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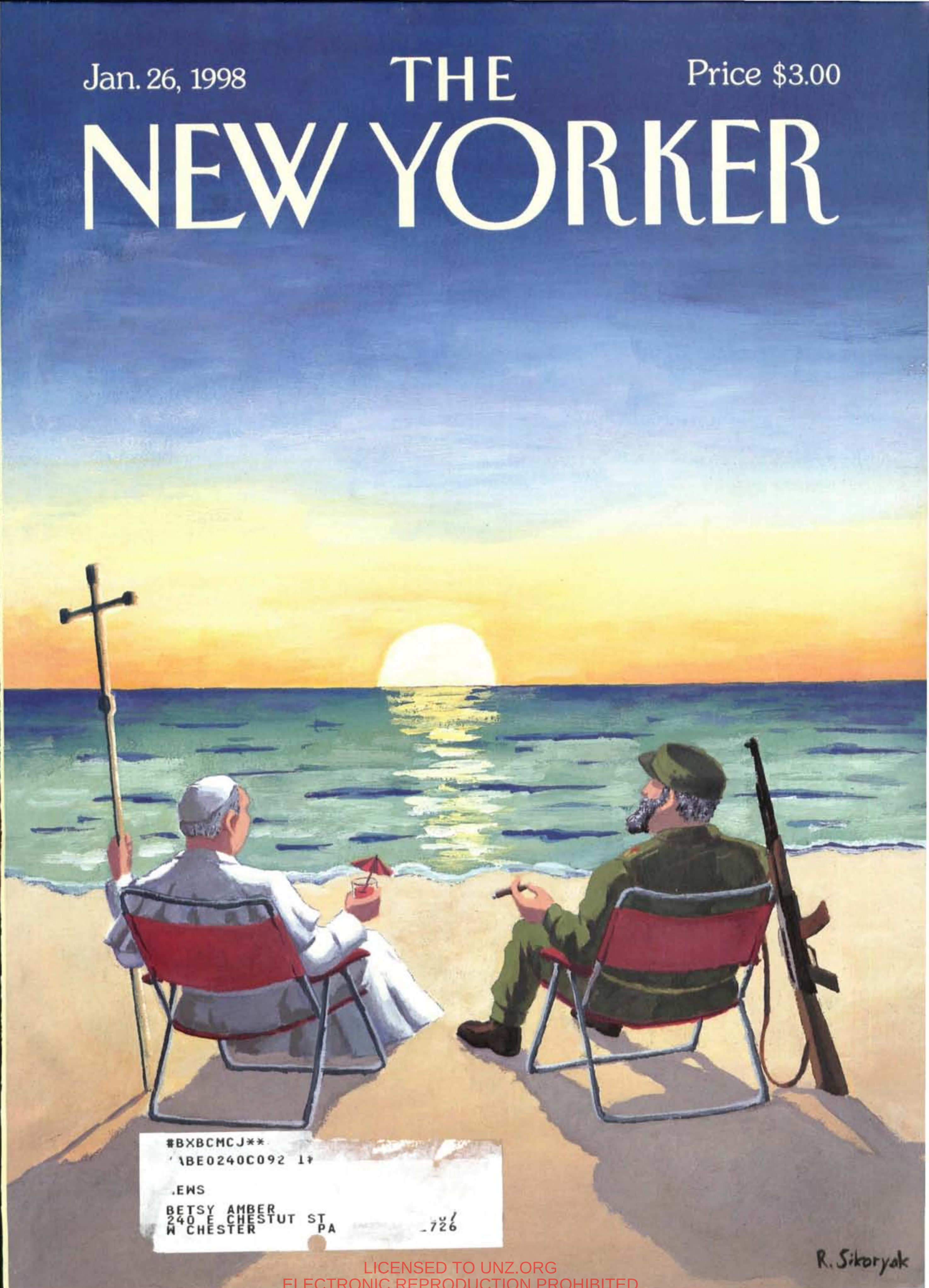

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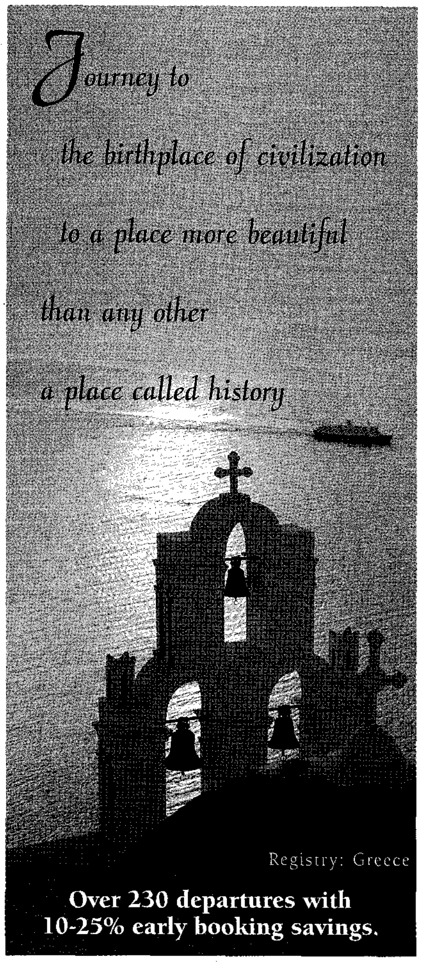

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THE NEW YORKER
CUBA ISSUE

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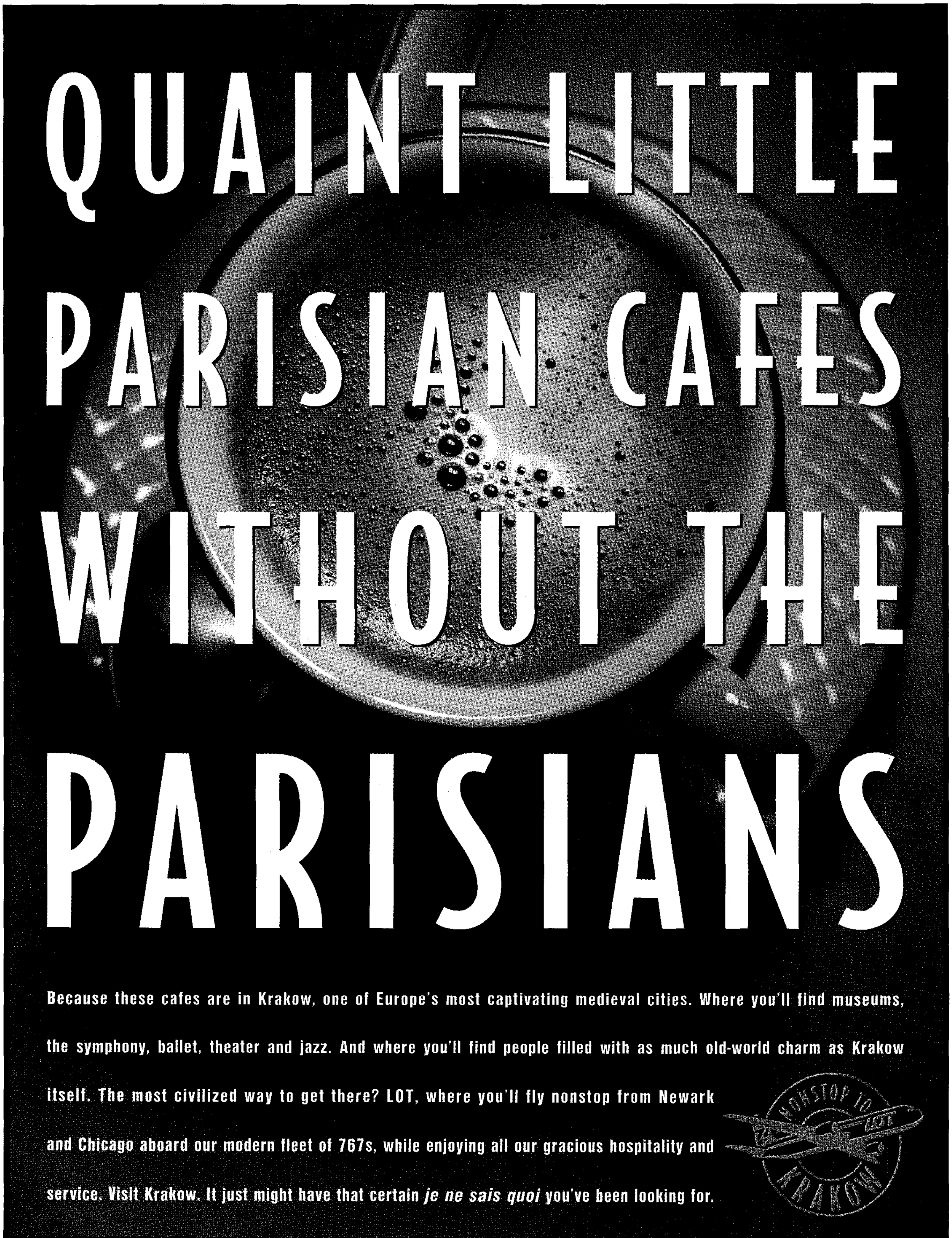

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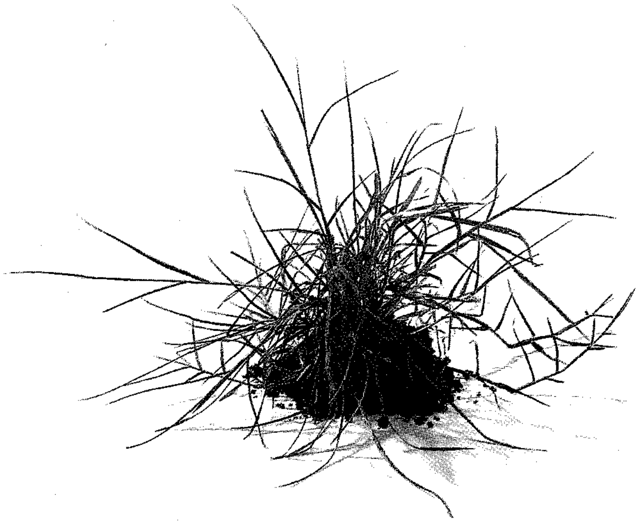
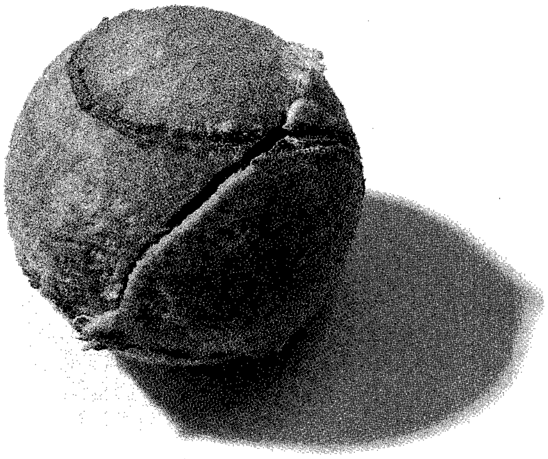


digitaria sanguinalis
(crabgrass)

ambrosia franseria
(ragweed)

taraxacum officinale
(dandelion)



antīquus pila tenisiae
(old tennis ball)

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SOTHEBY'S

COMMENT

THE HIGH COST OF A GOOD DRINK

Will we ever taste Havana Club?

FOR nearly forty years, Fidel Castro has ruled Cuba in the name of history and his own destiny, and in defiance of the United States. Historically, America's enmity has been lethal through much of Latin America, and nowhere has this been more true than in the Caribbean. Until 1959, the Republic of Cuba was seen as an instrument of the United States, its virtual creation. Then Castro came to power.

Fidel's refusal to submit to the Americans was admired on a visceral level throughout Latin America. Latins, insulted and injured by the United States (a nation most of them liked to regard as culturally inferior to their own nations), rejoiced deeply in his defiance. Many even believed they had a beautiful secret: that the Americans—crass, crude, charmless, mercantile, and arrogant—would be brought down by their own lack of intellectual substance. Marxism, an ideology lost on the illiterate Americans but respected by the greatest minds of Europe, would provide a scientific mode of liberation from humiliating Yanquidom.

It didn't turn out that way. But in Latin America many things are worse than defeat. And, even in defeat, the hero, this very Latin hero, endures—in his assertive dignity, his contempt for fortune, and his operatic aspirations (and orations). Fidel's romantic despising of pragmatism may make Americans smile, but it reverberates in the Latin world. And if global economics and its attendant necessities have compelled other Latin leaders to bend their knees northward the fact that El Caballo will not—this Man from the Mountains, from the land of the palm tree—makes many feel a little better.

American hostility has enabled Castro to wrap himself in the colors of Cuban nationalism. It has enabled him to attack internal dissidents as agents of a foreign power. But perhaps nothing inspires greater sympathy for Castro, and for Cuba, than the embargo.

LAST month, for the first time since 1968, the streets of Havana were decorated for Christmas. UNESCO funding and the high spending of non-American tourists had retrieved some of the glories of La Habana Vieja, the marvellous Old City, from the dry well of decrepitude. The Fountain of the Lions and the centuries-old Church of San Francisco de Asís were floodlit. The Calle Obispo, from Hemingway's clean, well-lighted El Floridita to the Plaza de Armas, was alive with Christmas crowds.

Cuba was coping. Teachers, making a mere eighteen dollars a month, were playing the guitar for pennies on rush-

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hour buses after work. Doctors were driving taxis. They—like many of the other citizens without access to dollars—were bearing the brunt of an economy in agony. The Army was taking over more and more of industry—including, discreetly, tourism. It was impossible to visit Cuba, even at Christmas, and not be reminded of the embargo.

It began in 1963. President Kennedy invoked a piece of 1917 legislation, the Trading with the Enemy Act, to establish administratively Cuban Assets Control Regulations. This was the least violent of Kennedy's strategies to bring down Castro's dictatorship, and its goal was to "isolate Cuba economically" by forbidding commerce between the two countries.

Over the years, the provisions have changed. Exemptions were made for gift parcels. It became possible to send money: a Cuban living in America was allowed to remit as much as twelve hundred dollars a year to relatives on the island. Then, in 1994, when flotillas of Cuban refugees filled the Straits of Florida, these remittances were made illegal, perhaps to punish the Cuban government for allowing its citizens to vote with their feet. (Illegal or not, private funds from the mainland now bring in almost as much as the profits of sugar and tourism combined.)

THE latest embellishment, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, illustrates how little these regulations have to do with their original objective and how easily they are now being exploited by an embarrassing variety of special-interest groups. The bill, which was introduced in draft by Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Dan Burton in February, 1995, had wide support in the Senate and the House, but was not expected to become law. President Clinton had intended to veto it; its purpose, according to Clinton's Cuban-affairs adviser, Richard Nuccio, was Cuba's "societal collapse leading to a violent upheaval." But then two planes flown by anti-Castro protesters from Miami—members of Brothers to the Rescue—were shot down in February of 1996 by the Cuban Air Force, and the President signed the measure with politically sensitive dispatch. Proponents presented it as a stick to punish Cuba for human-rights violations, and the boycott was extended in various ways. Most significantly, the law undertook to punish foreign investors "trafficking in" (the phrase, it is said, was chosen for its nasty connotations) or doing business with concerns once owned by Cubans who had since become American citizens. This is the most controversial feature of the act, and one that was written, in part, by an unlikely author.

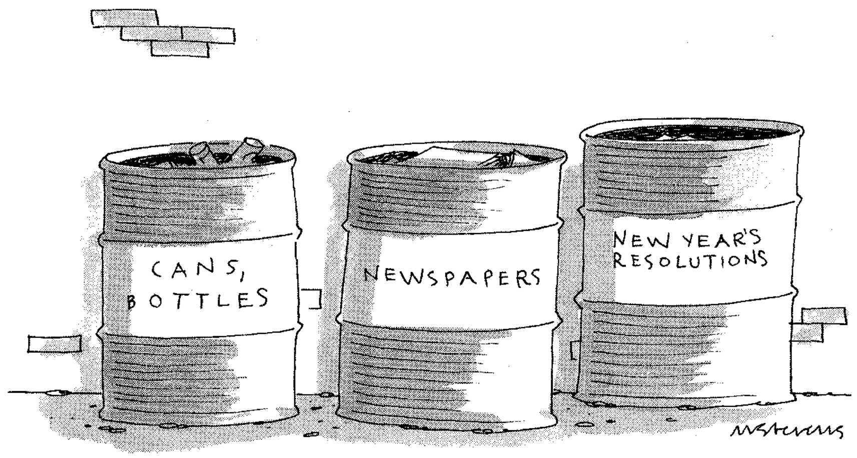
This piece of legislation, of course, is the Helms-Burton Act. What many still don't realize is that in many quarters it was also known as the Bacardi Bill. It is illuminating to discover why.

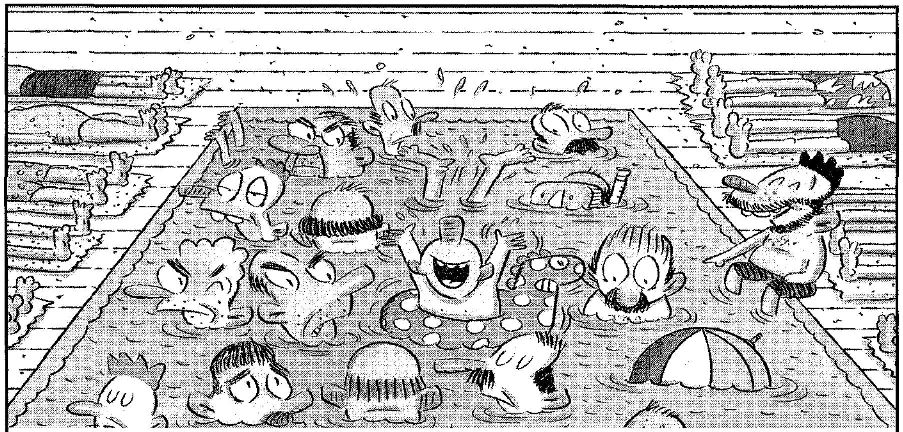
About three years earlier, in November of 1993, one of France's largest liquor distributors, Pernod Ricard, signed a joint venture with the Cuban government to market Havana Club globally. Havana Club is a Cuban rum regarded by many as superior to anything produced by Bacardi. And within the next few months Bacardi, an ancient Castro foe (it owned distilleries that were confiscated in the Revolution), became even more involved in Cuban-American relations. The timing is revealing. The company was soon promoting the idea of new legislation to tighten the embargo, and the president of Bacardi in America (Bacardi-Martini USA is wholly owned by the family's holding company in the tax haven of Bermuda) played host to a fund-raiser for Jesse Helms, at about the same time that the North Carolina senator was discovering the passionate potential in the Cuban cause. Bacardi's lawyers later worked with the Helms team in drafting the most controversial section of the Helms-Burton Act.

What did Bacardi have to gain? The company claims that some of its distilleries are being used by Havana Club. And now, if these provisions of the Helms-Burton Act (terms, after all, devised by Bacardi itself) are put into effect, the company would be able to sue for damages in the American courts. Most important, it could sue Havana Club's international distributor. It's a tidy outcome: Castro has a new obstacle in securing Western investment, and Bacardi is able to undermine a threatening competitor.

None of this is particularly new, even if little of it is very well known. Gary Jarmin, the high-profile, right-wing chairman of the U.S.-Cuba Foundation, lobbied against the measure (he described it as "the Bacardi Rum Protection Act"), and Senator Christopher Dodd, of Connecticut, dismissed it as an example of "special interest legislation par excellence." But the story serves to illustrate the workings of the embargo: like so many of the regulations that preceded it, the Helms-Burton Act ends up inhibiting the growth of Cuba's free market, enhancing the romance of Castro's defiance of the United States, and preserving his regime. There is little in the act that is about Cuba at all—in any real political sense—and a great deal in it about special-interest groups' exploiting a highly inflammatory piece of politics. With the embargo further extended, the Castro regime is once more provided with a cloak to veil its economic incompetence and once more has an issue by which to assert its national sovereignty.

Is it any wonder that the United States fails to command the world's respect in its struggle with Castro, and that Castro, for all his faults, attracts so much general sympathy? —ROBERT STONE





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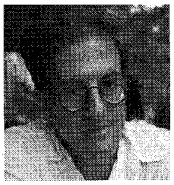

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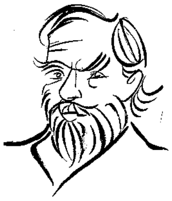

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ROBERT POLIDORI (photographs, p. 50) had his first book of photography, "Versailles," published in 1991; his book on Greco-Roman sites in Libya will be out later this year. His work has been shown at the Robert Miller Gallery, in New York. ♦

THE MAIL

UNDERSTANDING MOSES

I was the chief engineer on Robert Moses's staff for the New York World's Fair in 1964 and 1965. Although I am not an admirer of Moses, I must disagree with Robert Caro's assertion that Moses's "philosophical beliefs" led him to allocate "the city's resources to the benefit of its middle, upper-middle, and upper classes at the expense of the city's lower-middle class and its poor" ("The City-Shaper," January 5th). Moses didn't care two hoots about the upper class; all he respected was power, and he respected labor unions as much as wealthy individuals. In all fairness, the works he created were enormously beneficial to the city, and Moses undoubtedly believed that the long-term advantages of those works outweighed the pain and suffering caused to the many people who were displaced by them. Perhaps he was wrong, but a whole series of governors and mayors, who were generally backed by the public, agreed with him.

William Whipple, Jr.
Princeton, N.J.

THE NATURE OF GENIUS

Rendering the publication of his novel "The Book of Kings" impossible seems the cleverest strategy James Thackara could have devised for keeping his lofty appraisal of his own talent intact ("A Legend in His Own Mind," by John Walsh, December 22nd & 29th). Which is a shame. As John Simon once wrote about Orson Welles, "The sad thing is that he has consistently put his very real talents to the task of glorifying his imaginary genius."

Andrew Lewis Conn
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. Walsh concludes that there is no moral to the tale of James Thackara and his publishing travails, but he's wrong. Publishing executives, like those in many other creative fields, constantly prattle on about the "genius" or "talent" of those whose work they promote, as they did about Thackara, and then wonder how egos like his get created. The clear moral I came away with is "You reap what you sow."

Charles M. Seigel
Scottsdale, Ariz.

PENMANSHIP COUNTS

The assortment of Christmas cards from Anna and Richard Wagner, a German couple ("Stille Nächte," December 22nd & 29th), reflected many adjustments to local and national conditions over the years from 1900 to 1942. One change that many readers may not have noticed is that in the photographs from 1900 to 1935 the legend underneath is written in Latin letters, while in the 1942 photo it is written in German, or Sütterlin, script. Historically, both scripts were taught and used in schools, but the Nazis, of course, emphasized everything German. The Wagners' change in script, whether intentional or not, is striking.

Gunther L. Eichhorn
Rockville, Md.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

In "Shadows and Fog" (Books, January 5th) Anthony Lane describes Edward Steichen's 1955 "Family of Man" exhibit as a "queasy foreshadowing of the visual torrent in which we now daily swim," and adds that its "cascading humanism looks easy and low-cost." "The Family of Man" was created only ten years after the end of the Second World War, and only two or three years after the heyday of McCarthyism. Humanism then wasn't all that easy or low-cost, and the universality of the show's images still reaches out to the viewer. That others were influenced by this exhibit is evident, but today's busy visual world isn't Steichen's fault.

Joe Steinbock
Sonoma, Calif.

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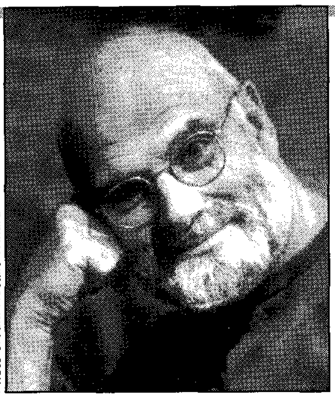

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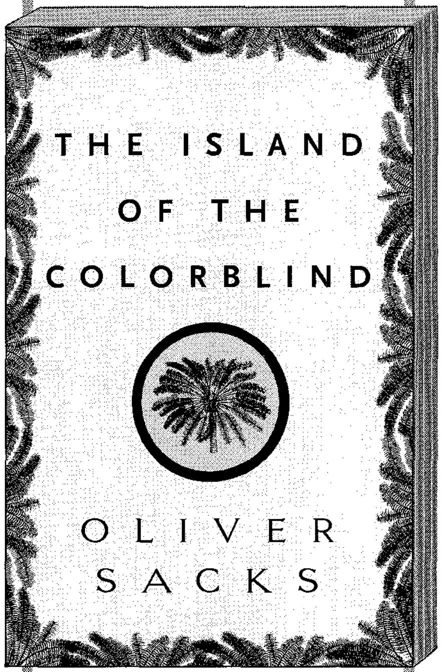

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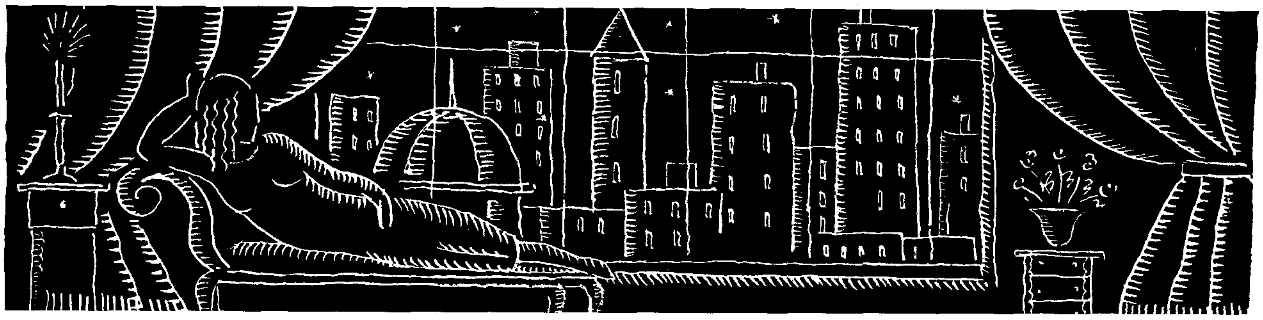

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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25	26	27				

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

The Capeman—A musical by Paul Simon and Derek Walcott, based on the life of Salvador Agron, a New York gang member who in 1959, at sixteen, was sentenced to death for murder. Directed and choreographed by Mark Morris. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Eyes for Conseula—Sam Shepard's new play, which stars David Strathairn, is an adaptation of Octavio Paz's 1976 short story "The Blue Bouquet." Terry Kinney is the director. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Freak—John Leguizamo portrays dozens of characters in his new one-man show. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Gun-Shy—In Richard Dresser's romantic comedy, an ex-couple finds divorce as difficult to maintain as marriage. Directed by Gloria Muzio. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Phaedra in Delirium—Susan Yankowitz's contemporary take on Euripides, co-staged by Classic Stage Company and Women's Project & Productions. Kathleen Chalfant and Peter Jay Fernandez star. In previews. (CSC, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210.)

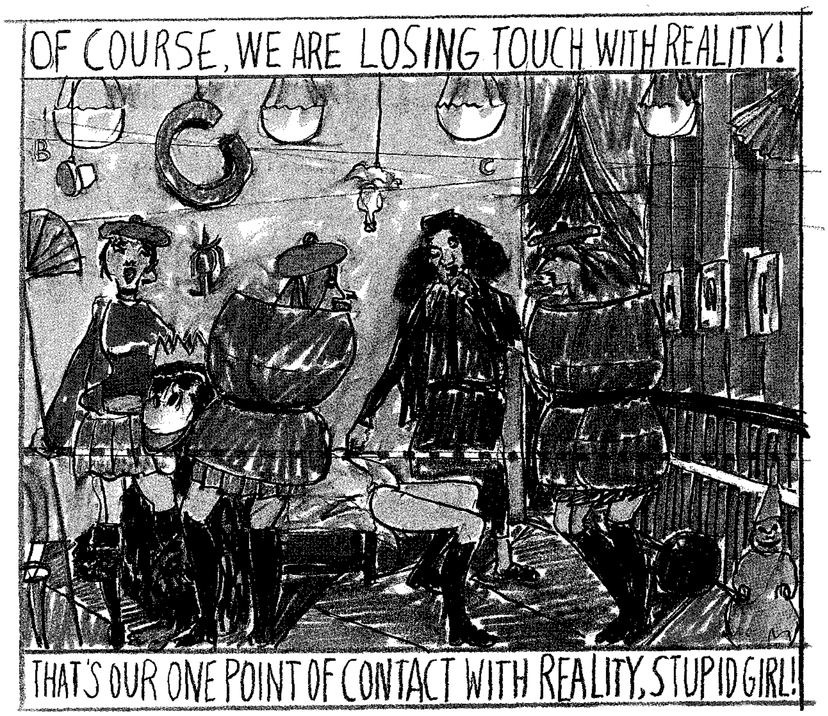
R & J—Four students at a boys' boarding school mount a production of "Romeo and Juliet," in this adaptation by Joe Calarco, originally staged earlier this season at Expanded Arts. Preview on Jan. 21. Opens Jan. 22 at 7. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 354-2220.)

Scotland Road—In Jeffrey Hatcher's mystery, a woman rescued from an iceberg in the North Atlantic claims to be a survivor of the Titanic disaster. Melia Bensussen is the director. In previews through Jan. 25. Opens Jan. 27 at 8. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Shopping and Fucking—British playwright Mark Ravenhill's portrait of dissolute youth in London. Max Stafford-Clark and Gemma Bodinetz co-directed. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

Song at Sunset—A one-man show about the playwright Sean O'Casey, written and directed by his daughter, Shivaun, and performed by the Irish actor Niall Buggy. Preview on Jan. 21. Opens Jan. 22 at 7. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Theatre for a New Audience—Presenting repertory performances of "Richard II" and "Richard III," starring Steven Skybell and Christopher McCann, respectively. Ron Daniels is the director. In previews. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)


OF COURSE, WE ARE LOSING TOUCH WITH REALITY!
B
C
THAT'S OUR ONE POINT OF CONTACT WITH REALITY, STUPID GIRL!

Richard Foreman's "Benita Canova."

MICHAEL CRAWFORD

OPENED RECENTLY

The Ballad of Emma Munro—A drama written and directed by Timothy Lea, in which a young girl, after coming home from school, refuses ever to leave again. (Raw Space, 529 W. 42nd St. 388-2981.)

Bashevis: Tales of I. B. Singer—Three of Isaac Bashevis Singer's stories, beguilingly told by the actor David Margulies, whose performance brings fresh life to these wise and funny tales of Jewish intellectuals in Europe and America. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 354-2220.)

Beauty—Steven Patterson's one-man show, inspired by the works of Jean Genet. (Theatre Off Park, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556.)

Benita Canova—Richard Foreman's new play, about a band of menacing schoolgirls, was inspired by the works of the painter Balthus. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Black Humor—Topical comedy, written and performed by the political satirist Lewis Black. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 989-2020.)

Century City—Mark Lee's drama—about a celebrity baseball pitcher (Marcus Giamatti, who looks the part but yells too much) accused of rape, and the lawyer (the dependable and natural Ellen Parker) who defends him—is the dramatic equivalent of a pop fly: it starts out with promise, then finds nowhere to go in the second act but down. Still, like a fly ball that gets caught, even with its disappointing outcome it's fun to watch. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes Jan. 24.)

The Country Wife—Wycherley's Restoration comedy, presented by the Westside Repertory Theatre. Alex Roe is the director. (252 W. 81st St. 874-7290.)

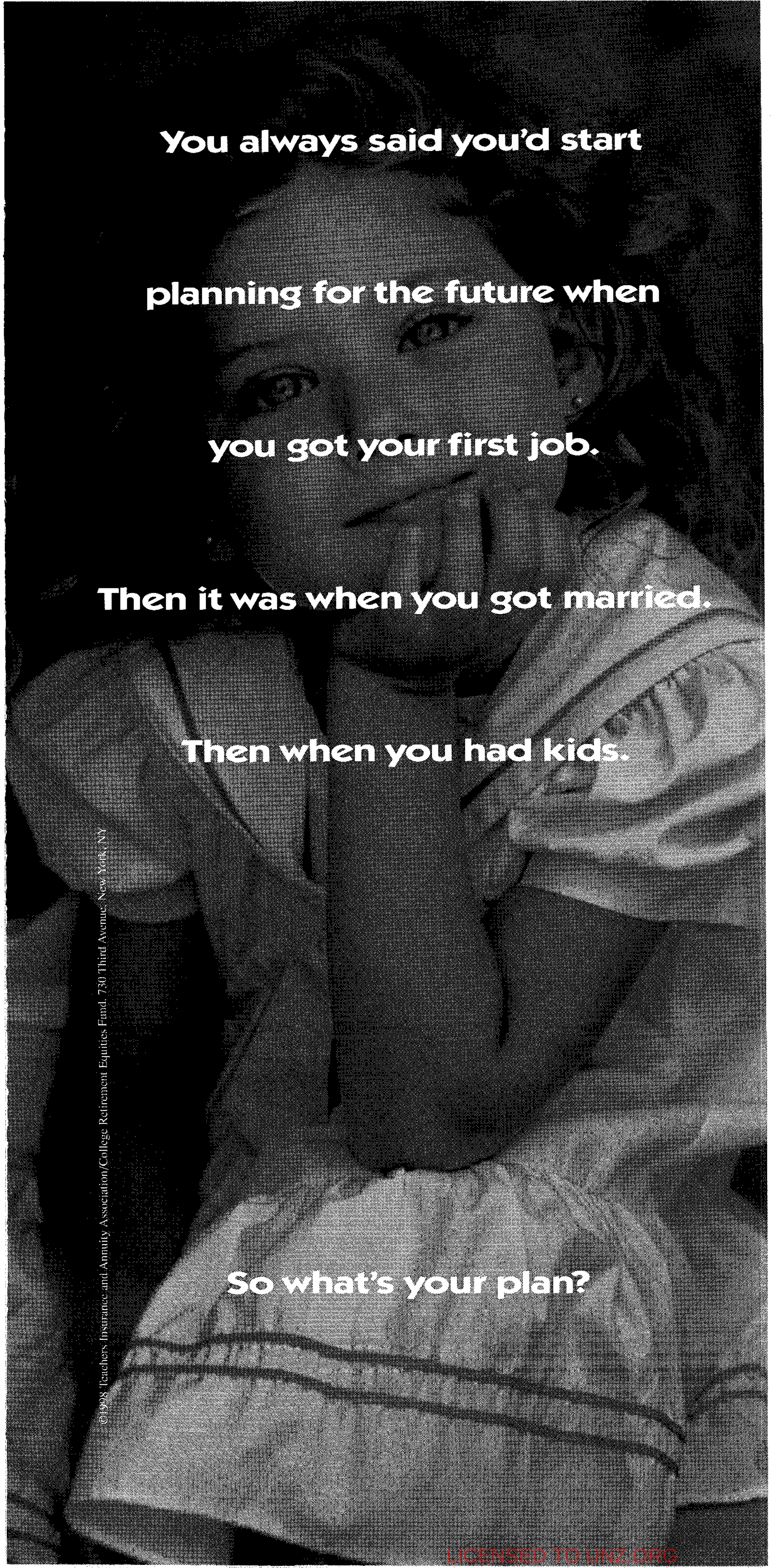
Cyrano de Bergerac—Frank Langella directs, and dons the schnozz in, his own adaptation of Rostand's romantic drama, from a translation by Brian Hooker. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes Jan. 25.)

The Diary of Anne Frank—Theatrically, this revival of the 1955 play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, which aims for realism and historical scrupulousness, is an improvement over the original, and the cast, under the direction of James Lapine, is generally fine. But the play's realism is also its fundamental flaw. Accuracy is not a substitute for truth—and one of the truths we take away from Anne's diary is that we *can't* know what it was like. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/15/97.) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Field of Mars—A production inspired by Tacitus, in which the audience wanders through the set as the action progresses. Staged by Gale Gates et al. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597. Closes Jan. 24.)

Goose-Pimples—Under the clear-eyed direction of Scott Elliott, the New Group brings a near-excruciating realism to Mike Leigh's bleakly comic 1981 portrayal of the cruelty disappointment can inspire. At the end of the play's two and a half hours—it takes place virtually in real time—you'll feel lucky to have lived through it. The show reopens at INTAR on Jan. 23. (420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

I Can't Remember Anything/The Last Yankee—The Signature Theatre Company's Arthur Miller season continues, with two slight one-acts. The first is a very funny look at old age, charmingly acted by Joseph Wiseman and Rebecca Schull; there's something poignant lurking, but the script seems to keep heading the actors off. The second,



You always said you'd start
planning for the future when
you got your first job.
Then it was when you got married.
Then when you had kids.
So what's your plan?

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too, has its funny turns (particularly the ones involving Peter Maloney), but it's basically a rant against materialism and not being nice. A breathtaking moment when Shami Chaikin, as a depressed woman, suddenly comes out of her shell, tap-dancing, provides the only bit of depth—and, again, the actress didn't find it in the script. Joseph Chaikin's direction and E. David Cosier's sets are both marvellous. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes Feb. 8.)

I'm Still Here . . . Damn It!—A mean little cocktail from Sandra Bernhard, composed of equal parts stand-up, performance art, cabaret, world-weariness, and dish, delivered from her spike-heeled perch. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-7171.)

The Irish . . . and How They Got That Way—A generally good-natured if somewhat choppy revue by Frank McCourt, performed by a versatile and charming cast of six singers and musicians. Deftly directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Jan. 25.)

Jackie—A complete delight. The playwright, Gip Hoppe, may be satirizing what we think we know about the former First Lady, but he does it with such heart and high comedy that you may not want to leave the theatre. Margaret Colin leads the gifted cast, and Hoppe, who also directed, is aided and abetted in this zaniness by the set designer David Gallo. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Joseph Gabriel Magic '98—Mr. Gabriel comes to New York by way of Las Vegas. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

June Moon—Ring Lardner and George S. Kaufman's 1929 comedy, set in the world of Tin Pan Alley, is a loving satire of show-biz and musical-comedy conventions, and it has been given an appropriately loving revival under the direction of Mark Nelson. But, although the production hits the right tone, it holds that tone too long—twenty minutes' worth of cuts would transform it from a pleasure into a delight. The good cast includes Justin Kirk, Jessica Stone, Albert Macklin (who, in an Oscar Levant-ish role, *is* a delight), Robert Joy, and Cynthia Nixon. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

La Mama—Jan. 22-24 at 7:30 and Jan. 25 at 3 and 7:30: The Talking Band performs "Black Milk Quartet," four mini-operas, composed by Dan Froot, Ellen Maddow, Harry Mann, and Gina Leishman, each with a libretto by Paul Zimet. Through Feb. 8. . . . ¶ Jan. 22-24 at 10: "Second Annual Telethon," a satire written by and starring David Ilku and Ken Bullock. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

The Last Session—A musical by Steve Schalchlin (music and lyrics) and Jim Brochu (book), about an AIDS-afflicted songwriter's final studio work. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Libertine—Stephen Jeffreys's 1994 play about the randy Earl of Rochester. (Theatre Row Theatre, 424 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 25.)

Life's Loss's Loved—Kirk Wood Bromley and Aaron Beall's contemporary sequel to "Love's Labour's Lost." (Nada, 167 Ludlow St. 420-1466. Closes Feb. 1.)

The Lion King—The director Julie Taymor has created a theatrical event far more textured and original than the animated film, submerging the audience in a mythic universe; it's like being in a dream awake. The show's high visual style, however, is in sharp contrast to its low verbal one. Garth Fagan is the choreographer. (11/24/97) (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

Marc Salem's Mindgames—The mentalist claims that his highly entertaining mind-reading act is both hocus-pocus-free (anyone who has studied the human mind for thirty years can do it, he claims) and scam-free (the producers have offered a hundred thousand dollars to anybody who can discover hidden electronic devices). Still, his fascinating "tricks" seem like magic, and the fun comes from trying to figure out how in the world he does them. At times you feel like you're the only person in the audience who isn't a plant. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Never the Sinner—John Logan's 1985 play about Leopold and Loeb, the teen-age millionaires who murdered a child in Chicago in 1924, sweeps its audience into the boys' friendship without ever losing sight of the brutal murder—a balancing act that Mr. Logan and the director, Ethan McSweeny, carry off seamlessly. Jason Patrick Bowcutt and Michael Solomon are beautifully matched and utterly convincing as the killers; Robert Hogan, as their attorney, Clarence Darrow, is a winning combination of the humane and the calculating. The show resumes performances at the John Houseman Theatre on Jan. 24. (450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

The Old Neighborhood—David Mamet's three elegant, autobiographical one-act plays full of laughter and lament. Well acted by Peter Riegert, Patti LuPone, Vincent Guastaferro, Rebecca Pidgeon, and Jack Willis, and crisply directed by Scott Zigler. Serious, beautiful, and short: an almost impossible feat these days on Broadway. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Pride's Crossing—Tina Howe's new play is a tedious switchback ride up a mountain of memories from the life of Mabel Tidings Bigelow, who is ninety and once swam the English Channel. Howe makes the fatal mistake of confusing illustrative incident with dramatic action. Fortunately, Mabel is portrayed by Cherry Jones, who polishes all the tics, fumbles, and feisty outbursts of a nonagenarian to a high shine. Jack O'Brien directed. (1/5/98) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Ragtime—Terrence McNally (book) and Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens (score) have adapted E. L. Doctorow's 1975 novel for the musical stage. Frank Galati is the director. (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

Ricky Jay & His 52 Assistants—The sleight-of-hand artist returns to the stage with an encore production of his 1994 one-man show. Directed by David Mamet. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 787-3471.)

The Scarlet Pimpernel—This new musical, based on the Baroness Orczy novel, has a lot going for it (if you don't count its music and lyrics, which are dreadful and appalling, respectively): its charismatic star, Douglas Sills, Andrew Jackness's sets, and Jane Greenwood's costumes. Peter Hunt directed. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

The School for Scandal—With productions as good as this one by the Pearl Theatre Company, it's easy to see why Richard Brinsley Sheridan's two-hundred-and-twenty-year-old comedy of manners has remained so popular. A topnotch ensemble of seventeen gives the play, which concerns the perils of gossip, everything it deserves and more. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Jan. 25.)

Secrets Every Smart Traveler Should Know—A comic revue inspired by the Fodor's handbook of the same title. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

1776—Scott Ellis's lean, lively production of Sherman Edwards and Peter Stone's still fresh 1969 musical about the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. (9/8/97) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

The Show Goes On—Lyricist-librettist Tom Jones and composer Harvey Schmidt star in a revue of their songs. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

Street Corner Symphony—A revue of some thirty songs, mostly from the sixties and seventies, which turns into a real beltfest at times. When the eight cast members tone things down a bit and do some harmonizing, though, you recognize what the show could have been. Conceived, choreographed, and staged by Marion J. Caffey. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

The Sunshine Boys—A revival of Neil Simon's comedy about two irascible old vaudevillians which provides a double dose of nostalgia: the tour guides for this trip to a bygone era of show biz are Ye Olde Odd Couple of television, Tony Randall and Jack Klugman. While there are some very funny lines, the production is somehow lacking in chemistry. The sandpapery friction that the twosome created so successfully on TV isn't much in evidence—they seem reduced to lovability. That's not a crime, but this production is definitely for those who prefer a warm cup of cocoa to a brisk toboggan ride. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Two Pianos, Four Hands—With the Canadian keyboardists Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Underground Goddess—Abigail Gampel's one-woman show, which she describes as "a raw, Ann Margret-style theatre event . . . with lots of song styles, a bit of dance, and a great gown." (Nuyorican Poets Café, 236 E. 3rd St. 505-8183. Closes Jan. 31.)

A View from the Bridge—Despite its cool reception in 1955, Arthur Miller's tragic story of the longshoreman Eddie Carbone and his obsession with his orphaned niece proves, in this Roundabout Theatre revival, a potent and durable American fable. Under the skillful direction of Michael Mayer, Anthony LaPaglia gives Eddie a brooding, exciting presence, and Brittany Murphy, as his niece, captures every nuance of her character's child-woman appeal. The expert cast also includes Allison Janney, as Eddie's frazzled wife. The

"The Field of Mars," a production by Gale Gates et al.

LAURENT CILLUFFO

Some children go to seek out their heroes.

The glory of their nations.

Traditions that stretch back two thousand years.

Others get to go because it's part of tonight's homework assignment.

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There's a new Web site that draws on the drama of the Olympic Games. Only this one uses the Nagano Games to teach kids about math, science and history. The Web site, The U.S. Olympic PBS Cyber School Powered by IBM, features interactive educational challenges and activities specially designed by teachers and students. It's a window into how the Internet can be used effectively to inspire learning. With its high-quality content and exciting graphics, the site relies on IBM's partnership with PBS and the power of the Olympic Games to make every child a winner. It's a part of IBM's commitment to doing everything possible to improve education. Our goal: better schools and smarter kids.

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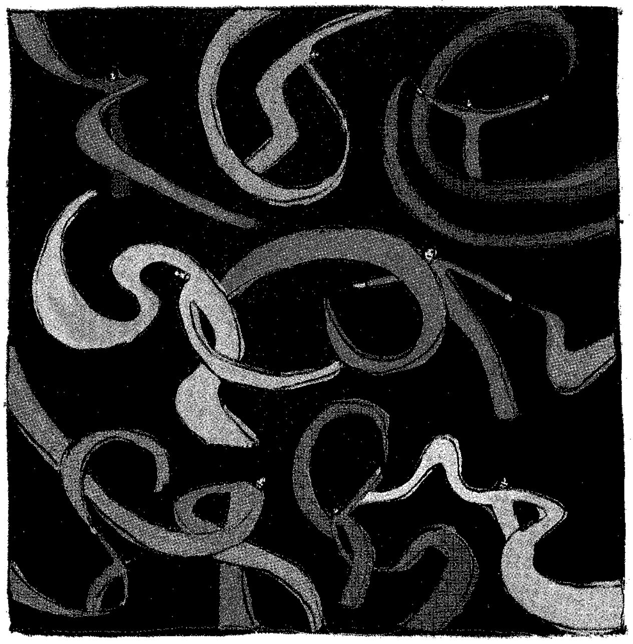
spare but suggestive set is by David Gallo. (1/5/98) (Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300.)

VIRTUE: SENPO SUGIHARA—A drama by Koichi Hiraishi, based on the actions of Senpo Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat who helped free thousands of Polish Jews while stationed in Lithuania in 1940. A production of Tokyo's Gekidan Dora Theatrical Company. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Closes Jan. 23.)

VISITING MR. GREEN—Eli Wallach portrays a Jewish widower, in a drama by Jeff Baron. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.)

LONG RUNS

AS BEES IN HONEY DROWN: Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY STRIKES BACK!:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOREVER TANGO:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GROSS INDECENCY: THE THREE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000. . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE:** Century, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **LATE NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 279-4200. . . . **THE LIFE:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 239-6200.



Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, in "Calligraphy 2," at the Altogether Different festival, at the Joyce.

MARINA SAGONA

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—Jan. 21 at 8: "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," "Slavonic Dances," and "West Side Story Suite." . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 8: The premières of "Concerti Armonici" and "Variations on a Nursery Song," choreographed by Peter Martins and Richard Tanner, respectively, and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 8: "Brandenburg," "In Memory of . . . ," "A Suite of Dances," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 2: "Jewels." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: "Monumentum Pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "A Suite of Dances," "In Memory of . . . ," and "West Side Story Suite." . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 3: "Monumentum Pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Duo Concertant," "Concerti Armonici," and "Brandenburg." . . . ¶ Jan. 27 at 8: "Scotch Symphony," "Concerti Armonici," and "The Concert." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through March 1.)

MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV—The étoile appears in a program of solos: Kraig Patterson's "Tryst"; Mark Morris's "Three Russian Preludes"; Sara Rudner's "HeartBeat: mb," set to a score that includes the sound of Baryshnikov's own amplified heartbeat; and José Limón's "Chaconne," from 1942. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 21-24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 3.)

"ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT"—The annual festival of contemporary dance concludes. The Taiwan native **NAI-NI CHEN** applies a modern-dance sensibility to ancient Eastern subjects. In "Calligraphy 2," for example, her dancers race across the stage with long Grahamesque strands of silk, the trails of fabric lingering in the air behind them like brushstrokes. Jan. 20 and Jan. 24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 2. . . . ¶ **JOY KELLMAN & COMPANY:** Jan. 21-22 at 8. . . . ¶ **WALLY CARDONA QUARTET:** Jan. 23 at 8 and Jan. 24 at 2. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

DANCE X PROJECT—Choreographers born since the resignation of Richard Nixon present examples of their latest dances, including "Moo," by Jon Kinzel, "Fat," by Laura Staton, "New Safe," by DD Dorvillier," and "A New Kind of Satisfaction," by Paige Martin. The downtown costume designers include Cynthia Rowley, Betsey Johnson, and Liliana Casabel. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 23-25 at 8:30.)

CARNIVAL—Dance Theatre Workshop kicks off its two-month-long choreographers' showcase. Jan. 20-21 at 8: **KEELY GARFIELD** presents a trio of works on the family: "My Father Was a Spanish Captain," "My Mother Was a Four-Alarm Fire," and "The Further Adventures of Slap and Tickle." . . . ¶ Jan. 22-23 at 8: **BETH COINER** offers two premières, "Grunt" and "Veil," and last year's "Green Girl." (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Through March 22.)

"LATE NIGHT SUGAR FLIGHT"—Ben Munisteri and his four-member troupe, in the final performances of a full-length work set to an ad-hoc blend of music that ranges from Donizetti to Cornershop. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Jan. 23-24 at 11 P.M.)

COLORADO BALLET—The Denver-based company returns with repertory offerings by Petipa, Balanchine, Peter Pucci, and the troupe's artistic director, Martin Fredmann. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Jan. 25 at 2.)

"EXPOSURE"—Three choreographers (Daniel M. Gwirtzman, Lawrence Keigwin, and Pamela H. Warshay) share a program of collaborations (including "Hallway," created by Gwirtzman and Warshay in the forty-three-foot corridor of a Washington Heights apartment building) and premières. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 358-3857. Jan. 23-24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 3.)

"STALLING INTO ELATION"—A forty-five-minute solo, choreographed for Amanda Loulaki by Nina Winthrop, that is, in fact, a duet of sorts: throughout the work, the dancer performs before filmed images of herself dancing. (Kinnu, 43 Spring St. 223-0089. Jan. 22-25 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

YANNI—The hirsute composer-keyboardist who has become the Barbara Cartland of pop music. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Jan. 21-24 at 8.)

HOLLY COLE—The Toronto singer offers a glimpse into the future of folk: she's a big talent, a growling alto version of Rickie Lee Jones. "Temptation," her 1995 collection of Tom Waits songs, was fuelled by upright bass, brushstroked drums, and bluesy piano. Her latest disk is called "Dark Dear Heart." (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. Jan. 22 at 8.)

"CUBA: WHERE THE RHYTHM IS HOT"—Presented by Jazz at Lincoln Center. (See "Cuba in New York," page 16.) (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Jan. 22 and Jan. 24 at 8.)

JAZZ AT MOMA—The exciting young drummer Matt Wilson leads a quartet. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9491. Jan. 23 at 5:30.)

BADAL ROY ENSEMBLE—The jazz tabla player performs with guitarist Kenny Wessel, bassist Stomu Takeishi, and sitarist Amit Chatterjee. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. For information, call 545-7536. Jan. 23 at 8.)

"RIALTO RIPPLES: THE PIANO AND GEORGE GERSHWIN"—Pianists Dick Hyman, Allan Feinberg, and Rob Fisher perform Gershwin tunes for solo and duo piano. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 23 at 8.)

"AN EVENING WITH VIC DAMONE"—The man with "the best pipes in the business," according to Sinatra. With the masterly jazz singer Carol Sloane and the outstanding clarinettist Ken Peplowski. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 24 at 8.)

CLUBS

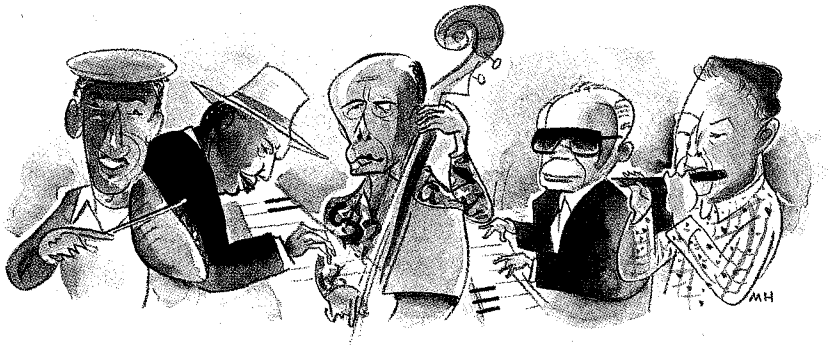
(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

ARLENE GROCERY, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—A narrow, dimly lit renovated bodega that's the perfect generic environment for three to five unknown bands each night trying to escape obscurity.

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Kansas native **FREEDY JOHNSTON** (Jan. 22) has a knack for churning out exacting folk-rock with a convincing Midwestern twang; his songs bristle with careful detail and piercing language. Grab this chance to hear him, as he's rarely in town. Jan. 23: Longtime Chuck Berry pianist **JOHNNIE JOHNSON.** Jan. 24: **STEVE FORBERT,** the folk-rock troubadour from Meridian, Mississippi, always offers a solid live show, and when he sings one of his full-bodied songs about love and longing and loss his fans have the pleasure of thinking, Yes—exactly.

BROWNIES, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—New Wave veterans the **BUSH TETRAS** come in on Jan. 24.

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is a fine spot to take in a show. Jan. 24: Neo-folkie **AMY RIGBY,** whose 1996 "Diary of a Mad Housewife" was one of that year's most egregiously overlooked albums, serenades the troops. Jan. 25: The **SUN RA ARKESTRA.** The



Enrique Lazaga, Chucho Valdes, Cachaito, Frank Emilio Flynn, and Joaquín (El Hilguero) Oliveros jam in "Cuba: Where the Rhythm Is Hot," at Alice Tully Hall.

MARCELLUS HALL

maestro has returned to Saturn, but his band plays on under the skillful direction of veteran saxophonist Marshall Allen. The unexpected is still to be expected. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 24: **CHRIS WHITLEY** is a terrific slide guitarist. Handsome (in a Bryan Adams sort of way) and frequently given to removing his shirt, he once seemed destined for matinée-idol rock stardom. Things haven't worked out that way, but he still makes searing, above-average pop, and he rarely disappoints.

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—A medium-sized, brick-walled haven of a back room where, no matter who's onstage, the listening is a pleasure. Jan. 23: Folky country-pop with the **SCHRAMMS.** Jan. 26: As the lead singer for the now defunct Smithereens, **PAT DI NIZIO** was as well known for his soul patch as he was for his well-crafted, unpretentious rock songwriting. Despite the tone-deaf title, his first solo album, "Song and Sounds," offers more of his meat-and-potatoes guitar.

RODEO BAR, 375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—The walls simulate a log cabin, a buffalo head blows smoke through its nostrils, a horse trailer has been converted into a bar. It's just about the best free house in town. Jan. 21: The **HEALTH & HAPPINESS SHOW.** This sprightly band, led by ex-Bongo James Mastro, called its 1993 début "Tonic," and its blend of country, folk, and rock is just that. Thanks to the exciting addition of ex-Television guitarist Richard Lloyd, "Instant Living," the group's 1995 release, had a decidedly harder edge. Jan. 23-24: **SLEEPY LA BEEF** is an Arkansas boy who is reputed to know six thousand songs; his sets are always full of surprises. Jan. 27: Former Del Fuego **DAN ZANES,** a wafer-thin rock-and-roller who writes dark, dreamy tunes in the manner of Chris Isaak.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

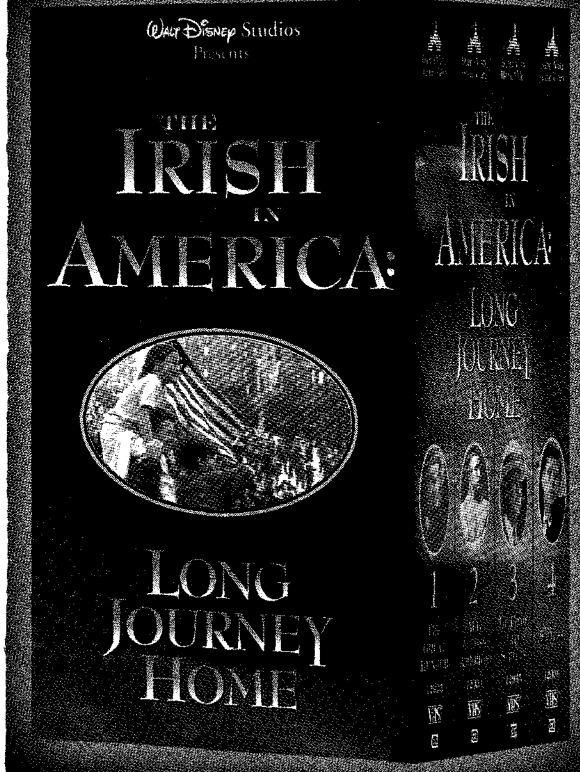
BIRDLAND, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Through Jan. 25: The **TOMMY FLANAGAN** trio. Now close to seventy, Flanagan presides over all of jazz piano. Of a poetic cast, he unreels endlessly supple lines, paying them out at whatever speed they demand. He likes to spread the melody out in chords in the first chorus, then compress the song into brand-new single-note improvisations that contain sudden ascending arpeggios, beautiful little countermelodies, and patches of mock double time. Jan. 26: The **TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI** jazz orchestra, featuring the bandleader's husband, tenorist and flutist **LEW TABACKIN.** Jan. 27: The **FAMOUS DUKE ELLINGTON ORCHESTRA,** directed by **PAUL ELLINGTON.** Dining.

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—R. & B. singer **RUTH BROWN** is in (through Jan. 25) with some friends, including saxophonist Charles Williams and guitarist Rodney Jones. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through March 7, the amazing **EARTHA KITT.**

IRIDIUM, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—The **JOHN ABERCROMBIE** trio is in through Jan. 25. Working with an organ trio over the past few years has toughened up Abercrombie's guitar playing. The lyricism that characterized his ECM heyday is still in place; his wispiness, however, has been replaced by bluesy muscle. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

JAZZ STANDARD, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—**WESS (WARMDADDY) ANDERSON** (through Jan. 22) is a Southern player—that is, his tone spreads out like butter over grits. Jan. 23-25: **BENNY WATERS'S NINETY-SIXTH-BIRTHDAY BASH.** Waters predates jazz itself. That this saxman can still conjure up the lusty pleasures of the Swing Era is a combined triumph of art and endurance. His birthday band this year features the all-star lineup of pianist Sir Roland Hanna, guitar-



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CUBA IN NEW YORK

Fidel slept here, Alonso danced here, and Che harangued the U.N. about Western imperialism here. Cubans found their way into these precincts before the Revolution and continue to do so. What follows is a short list of places and events where we can mingle with our fellow-islanders to the south.

Pathfinder Bookstore—A small, brightly lit storefront in Brooklyn offers accounts of contemporary Cuba not available in your local newspaper or your average textbook. This independent distributor sells the speeches and writings of the Revolution's leaders. Castro's 1962 manifesto "The Second Declaration of Havana" shares shelf space with Che's "Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956-58"; also available are copies of the Cuban Communist Party's newspaper, *Granma International*, and *La Gaceta*, a Spanish bimonthly published by Cuba's Union of Writers and Artists. "This is the place to find out what Cubans have to say about Cuba, not what other people write about it," says Ruth Robinett, who volunteers at the store. (59 Fourth Ave., at Bergen St. Brooklyn. 718-399-7257.)

"Cuba: Where the Rhythm Is Hot"—With each new Cuban virtuoso who visits our shores, the myth of our neighbor as a musical El Dorado grows. Cuba's fecund musical environment, where government-sponsored students are trained in all manner of classical and folk idioms, has fostered a steady crop of players with staggering technical skills. This week, the incredible pianist Chucho Valdes joins such accomplished (and lesser-known) players as flutist Joaquín (El Hilguero) Oliveros, bassist Cachaito (nephew of the legendary bassist Cachao), and percussionist Enrique Lazaga. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Jan. 22 and Jan. 24 at 8.)

"La Cenicienta"—The National Ballet of Cuba brings its own "Cinderella" to City Center next week, set not to the Prokofiev score but to the three-quarter-time strains of Johann Strauss, Jr. Pedro Consuegra's choreography sidesteps earlier paradigms (Ashton, Fokine) and transposes the festivities to the imaginary kingdom of Luxenstein. It is tempting to see Castro's influence in such choices, but it's just as easy to make out the hand of Alicia Alonso, the prima ballerina assoluta who founded the company in 1948 and has remained the dominant figure in Central American dance ever since. (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 27-30 at 8, Jan. 31 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 1 at 3.)

Center for Cuban Studies—This twenty-five-year-old Chelsea-based nonprofit is dedicated to providing information about Cuba and to achieving a normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States. The Center's library offers thousands of books, magazines, and newspapers, a vast clipping file, and special-study collections; the bimonthly *CUBA Update* covers politics, economics, and the arts; and the Cuban Art Space Project will soon make available a large collection of photographs, posters, and other works by Cuban artists. (124 W. 23rd St. 242-0559.)

La Rosita—As melting pots go, the heavy iron ones filled with tender and comforting arroz con pollo at this slightly tottery Cuban diner have been bringing together Cuban exiles, Harlemites, the Columbia crowd, and Upper West Siders for more than twenty years. The food falls under the category of good-and-plenty, and Spanish is definitely the preferred tongue, but the languidly efficient waitresses will leap the language barrier just in time to stop you from going overboard and ordering that stuffed-plantain appetizer. "No! It's too much," one commands. And, of course, she's right: when your embarrassingly inexpensive meal of shrimp soup (to start) and chicken stew arrives, it's accompanied by a plate of yellow rice and a bowl of black beans and covers half the table. (2809 Broadway, at 108th St. 663-7804.)

ist Frank Vignola, bassist Arvell Shaw, and drummer Grady Tate; here's hoping they can all keep up with the old man.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Through Jan. 25: **BOBBY PREVITE'S LATIN FOR TRAVELERS,** a lusty power quartet that exhibits yet another dimension of the super drummer's voracious imagination. Jan. 23: "A Night in Brazil," with guitarist **VINICIUS CANTUARIA** and percussionists **NANA VASCONCELOS** and **CYRO BAPTISTA.** Jan. 26: The **OLIVER LAKE BIG BAND.** Lake is one versatile musican. A tart-toned saxophone virtuoso who could sustain an entire evening with his solo improvisations, he's also a big thinker with a taste for large ensembles that can show off his meaty compositions and his sure sense of coloring. Jan. 28: **FRED HO'S BROOKLYN SAX QUARTET.**

Lenox Lounge, 288 Lenox Ave., between 124th and 125th Sts. (427-0253)—This Harlem club brings first-rate jazz back north with a vengeance. Now in his seventies, baritone saxophonist **CECIL PAYNE** (Jan. 23-24) is experiencing a glorious second wind. A dyed-in-the-wool bop musician who came up through Dizzy Gillespie's original late-forties big band, Payne rode out the changing waves of jazz fashion without ever losing the faith. Today, his burly blowing has an authenticity that can't be taught in schools.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. Through Feb. 7: Guitarist and vocalist **JOHN PIZZARELLI,** an agile musician and a pleasant low-key crooner from the Chet Baker/Alfalfa school. He's solidly backed by his brother, Martin, on bass, and Ray Kennedy on piano, making this the best-sounding cabaret act in town.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night. Jan. 23-24: The assured altoist **ZAID NASSER** is joined by pianist **HAROLD MABERN** and bassist **JAMIL NASSER,** two Memphis transplants who have been playing together for decades as the undergirding for the George Coleman quartet. The **JASON LINDNER BIG BAND** holds court every Monday; the **LARRY GOLDINGS** trio has Tuesdays; and the **SAM YAHEL ORGAN QUARTET** is in each Wednesday.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A jazz outpost where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through Jan. 25: **"A TRIBUTE TO CANNONBALL ADDERLEY."** No one has ever matched the way Adderley balanced bebop sophistication with home-grown funk (just listen to his pungent contributions to Miles Davis's stately masterwork "Kind of Blue"), but that hasn't stopped a few successive generations of alto saxophonists from trying. Here, some of our finer young Cannonballites join drummer Louis Hayes in a tribute to Hayes's former boss. Featured on separate nights will be Donald Harrison, Antonio Hart, Abraham Burton, and the remarkable Vincent Herring, a vicious player who may come closest of all to capturing Adderley's bounding spirit. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 25: Having the smarts to realize that even a stinging young virtuoso needs a group identity to set his gifts in relief, trumpeter **ROY HARGROVE** has assembled a tight, multi-voiced sextet with two saxophonists in the front line. (Sherman Irby, an exciting new player, has recently been the featured altoist.) Hargrove's vision may not yet equal his ambition, but he's been growing as a leader over the past few years. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—Through Jan. 24: **KEN PEPLOWSKI, MICHAEL MOORE, AND HOWARD ALDEN.** A chamber-jazz supergroup—clarinettist, bassist, and guitarist, respectively. They make beautiful music and beautiful music only, immersing themselves in the pleasures of melody and tone—three gently subversive generals leading an army of players which is fortifying the city with lyricism and grace. Starting Jan. 26: The **VALTIHNO BRAZILIAN JAZZ QUARTET.** Dining.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era." A sumptuous collection of rare Indian carpets from the late sixteenth century (when the Mughal emperor Akbar founded the first imperial carpet workshops) through the eighteenth. The finest were made from pashmina, the underfleece of the Himalayan mountain goat, on silk foundations, and there is a stunning example here from around 1630, during the reign of Shah Jahan, when the flower style dominated: a shimmering niche carpet in exquisite dyes—pink, sand, ivory, celadon, mandarin, garnet—with a leafy, blooming poppy plant flanked by a pair of tulips in the center. With about two thousand knots per square inch, it's breathtaking. Through March 1. . . . ¶ An exhibition at the Costume Institute devoted to the work of Gianni Versace. Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"New Video from Great Britain," a two-hour compilation of short works, each from one to eighteen minutes long, by Gillian Wearing, Ed Lipski, Sam Taylor-Wood, and others. On a continuous loop, through Feb. 1. . . . ¶ "Deadpan," Steve McQueen's aptly titled four-minute silent film inspired by a famous Buster Keaton sight gag. The artist conveys a Keatonesque stoicism as he stands in a field before a lone log house and one of its walls crashes down around him (in repeated takes). Fortunately, he's in a spot that corresponds to a window opening. Through Feb. 10. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"After 'Mountains and Sea': Frankenthaler 1956-59" gathers large-scale works in the thin-paint style of the artist's 1952 masterwork. Through May 3. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"Arthur Dove: A Retrospective," the first major exhibition in more than twenty years to examine the work of the Empire State abstractionist, who lived in a string of rustic accommodations—a farm, a houseboat, the custodian's quarters of a yacht club, an abandoned post office by a tidal pond—while fashioning palpitant, nonfigurative works reflecting his preoccupation with the natural world. (See also Galleries—Uptown, Short List.) Through April 12. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"The Nature of Diamonds" looks at many facets of the adamantine stone, from its birth in volcanic fissures to its eventual rise to the heads of heads of state (e.g., on the crown of Peter the Great, displayed in the exhibition's walk-in diamond vault). Through April 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"The Furniture of George Hunzinger: Invention and Innovation in Nineteenth-Century America." Settees, daybeds, plant stands, stationary rockers, and a multitude of other chairs (many of them Hunzinger's 1866-patented folding-reclining ones), by one of America's preëminent Victorian furniture makers. His constructions reflect the period's gluttonous appetite for the Gothic and the Baroque, as well as the aesthetics of his native southern Germany: there is a kind of Wagnerian madness to much of his work, but its unabashed eccentricity is precisely its appeal. However, his best constructions are his most Spartan ones, utilizing, in place of traditional upholstery, grids of woven wire which are, in fact, oddly beautiful. Through Feb. 15. (Open Wednes-

LAURA LJUNGKVIST

days through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays, 11 to 9; and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Dahesh Museum, 601 Fifth Ave., at 49th St. (759-0606)—"Rosa Bonheur: All Nature's Children," an exhibition of pretty animal studies and plein-air oils by the nineteenth-century artist, whose scandalous reputation appears to have come largely from her habit of wearing pants and smoking cigars. Through Feb. 21. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—"A Seal Upon Thine Heart: Glyptic Art of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3500-2100 B.C." Sun gods, griffins, superhuman conquerors, and miniature scenes of Mesopotamian life, all incised into stones, from marble to lapis lazuli. Through April 26. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St. (977-7170)—"A. G. Rizzoli: Architect of Magnificent Visions." The first museum survey devoted to work of the California eccentric (1896-1981) who created elaborate architectural portraits ("Mother Symbolically Represented/The Kathredal" [*sic*]), which he later linked into an elaborate utopian city that he called Y.T.T.E. ("Yield to Total Elation"). His art was essentially unknown in his lifetime. (The presentations he mounted in the family parlor were so scantily attended that he was able to create portraits of almost every visitor.) His drawings were recently rediscovered in the rafters of a grandnephew's garage. Through March 8. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—"Subject Matters: Photography, Romana Javitz, and the New York Public Library" catalogues the librarian's contributions to the Picture Collection, the invaluable archive she curated during its expansionary heyday, from 1929 to 1968. The exhibition includes a range of documentary photographs and examples of call slips with pictures drawn by patrons to identify images they were searching for. Through March 28. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

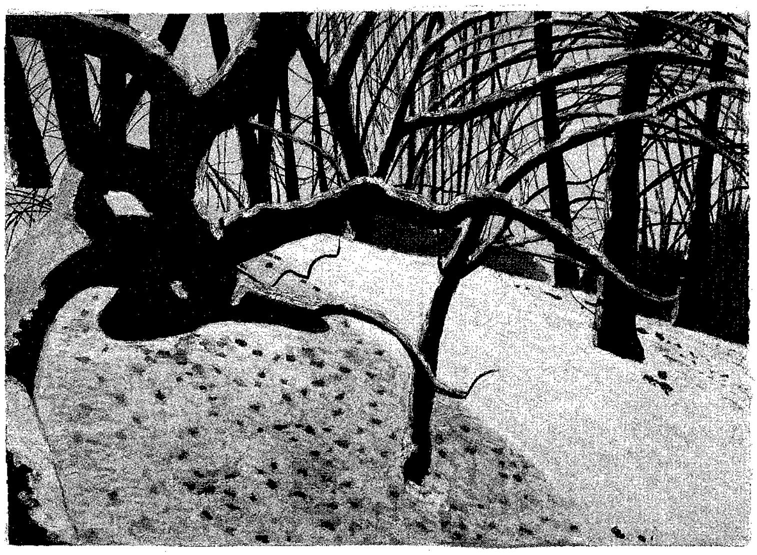
Joan Nelson—Two large, dark fictive landscapes in acrylic and oil on wood, and dozens of tiny, meticulous ones on paper, rendered, variously, in acrylic ink, spray enamel, wax, and glitter. Their size gives them the innate appeal of all miniatures, which take you to places far away; it also reminds you just how far away the natural world has come to seem. Through Jan. 24. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454.)

"The Green Mountain Boys"—Works by Anthony Caro, Paul Feeley, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski, a quartet of sculptors and painters who came out of Bennington College, where they were encouraged in their muscular brand of abstraction by the critic Clement Greenberg, who regularly visited the campus. Alan Solomon's 1966 article for *Vogue,* in which he coined the triple-pun moniker (which slyly combines the Vermont military detachment, Noland's Black Mountain apprenticeship, and Greenberg's beneficent gaze), is reprinted in the catalogue. Through Feb. 28. (Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. 752-0124.)

Short List—**HERBERT BROWN,** Gat, 1100 Madison Ave., at 82nd St. 327-0441. Through Feb. 28. . . . **ROBERT COANE,** Wright, 41 E. 57th St. 702-0132. Through Feb. 17. . . . **GUSTAVE COURBET,** Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays; through Feb. 28. . . . **ARTHUR DOVE,** Dintenfass, 20 E. 79th St. 581-2268. Through Feb. 28. . . . **ERIC FISCHL,** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Feb. 28. . . . **GEORGE GROSZ AND PHILIP EVERGOOD,** Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545. Through Feb. 21. . . . **RALPH HUMPHREY,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Through Feb. 14. . . . **MITCHELL JOHNSON,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through Jan. 28. . . . **CATHERINE REDMOND,** MB Modern, 41 E. 57th St. 371-3444. Through Jan. 31. . . . **ALTOON SULTAN,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; through Jan. 31. . . . **GEORGE TOOKER AND DEBRA BERMINGHAM,** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111. Through Feb. 7. . . . **HELEN TORR,** Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 535-5767. Through Feb. 21. . . . **JOHN WALKER,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550. Through Feb. 7.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Daniel Oates—New carved-wood sculptures by the young British artist, whose previous mode was a wanly humorous social realism. Now he has taken a turn for the surreal, and the results are not entirely satisfactory. Through Feb. 14. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)



Oil pastels of Prospect Park, by Joseph Di Giorgio (Steele).

Ernesto Pujol—Sculptures by a Cuban-born artist on the perennially popular themes of childhood and loss: rickety old birdcages and moldering baseball mitts interspersed with little clay phalluses. "Sensitive" art is supposed to look something like this. Through Jan. 31. (Kirkland, 504 W. 22nd St. 627-3930.)

"Elevator"—A group show, curated by Mungo Thomson, of artists employing New Age-isms in their art. Knut Asdam's video tries to encourage spatial awareness by hypnotizing the viewer. Corey McCorkle fashions "orthopedic aids for the cosmically inclined"—custom chairs that help the user maintain the lotus position. Benita and Immanuel Grosser conduct on-site yoga classes to encourage a state of "non-anticipation" in gallerygoers. Through Feb. 7. (Martz, 529 W. 20th St. 206-3686.)

"Vertical Time"—This group show, curated by Francesco Bonami, has an international focus, with artists from Italy, France, the Netherlands, South Africa, and South Korea; heavy on video and installation, it also has the look of institutionalized avant-gardism. The South African Willim Kentridge's animated film, a hellish, expressionistic tour of his home country, is probably the most accessible and engaging of the lot. Through Feb. 21. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9301.)

Group Show—Works by Eugenio Dittborn, Willie Doherty, Mona Hatoum, and Doris Salcedo. Through Feb. 28. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474.)

Short List—**THOMAS ANDERSEN,** Kreps, 529 W. 20th St. 741-8849. Through Jan. 28. . . . **LESLIE LEW BURNS,** Kravets/Wehby, 529 W. 21st St. 352-2238. Through Jan. 24. . . . **PETER CAMPUS,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Through Feb. 7. . . . **CHARLES A. A. DELLSCHAU,** Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Through Feb. 7. . . . **TERRI FRIEDMAN,** Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Through Feb. 7. . . . **ELLEN HARVEY AND JAROSLAW KOZAKIEWICZ,** De Folin, 529 W. 20th St. 242-3434. Through Feb. 14. . . . **GARY HUME,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Feb. 28. . . . **BOB KNOX,** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701. Through Jan. 31. . . . **FRANCISCO LEIRO,** Marlborough, 211 W. 19th St. 463-8634. Through Feb. 7. . . . **GLENN LIGON,** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through Jan. 28. . . . **HELEN MARDEN,** Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. 243-3753. Through Feb. 28. . . . **DAN WITZ,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through Feb. 21.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

John Baldessari—In "The Goya Series," the artist pairs his black-and-white emulsion-on-canvas photographs with titles drawn largely from Goya's "Disasters of War." Through Feb. 14. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160.)

Joseph Di Giorgio—Boldly composed oil-pastel landscapes of Prospect Park, each drawn six months after the season whose pageantries it depicts. The method gives the work a Wordsworthian piquancy: the Fauvist palette (lilac spring rain, lima-bean winter sky) looks truer than true when recollected in tranquillity. Through Jan. 24. (Steele, 420 West Broadway. 941-8388.)

Elana Herzog—Delightful, quirky sculptures fashioned from what look to be castoffs from the thrift store: old shower curtains, chenille bedspreads, a pink polyester blanket, a faded floral sheet, shiny gold drapery. The artist has sewn the shower curtains together and then cut them and stitched them with elastic to create an effect of frippery; draped the bedspreads high on the wall with strands of dripping beads; and stapled the blanket, artfully arranged on the floor, to another wall, cleverly transforming her materials into amusing, sophisticated formal objects whose poise belies their homely origins. Through Feb. 7. (P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

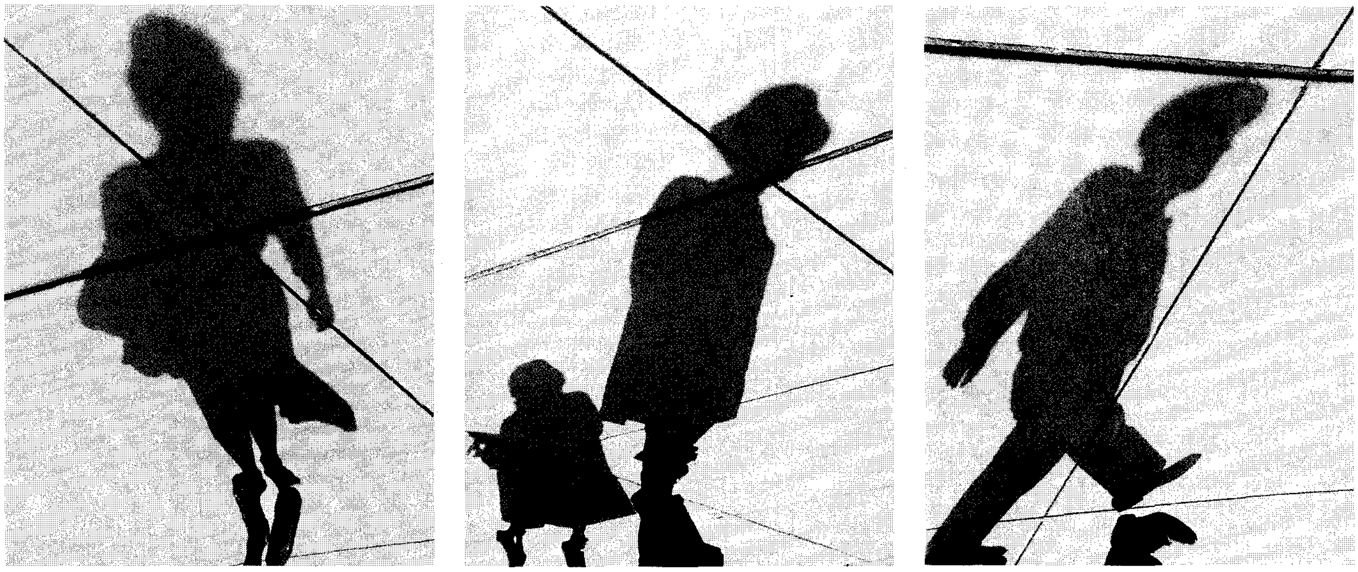
Marcel Odenbach—Videos and collages by a German artist who appears to be interested in war and racism—big, obvious themes. There are a lot of shocking images, but the artist's critical focus remains tentative and unclear. Through Jan. 31. (Kern, 558 Broadway. 965-1706.)

Alex Ross—An exhibition in green, of mostly abstract, biomorphic shapes and objects: tactile, jigsaw works made of small Gumby-like pieces of plasticine; wall hangings resembling cutouts of chemical-compound diagrams; and paintings of coffered vessels suggestive of organs or cytoplasm—all of it clean and quirky and cool. Through Feb. 13. (Feature, 76 Greene St. 941-7077.)

Ulrich Rückriem—A selection of minimal, monolithic sculptures, stunningly presented in the Ace Gallery's series of cavernous skylit rooms. Rückriem, a German artist who apprenticed as a stonemason thirty some years ago, selects enormous slabs of granite (from Finland, France, Spain, Africa), saws them into pieces, and then perfectly fits them together again, creating works that have the presence of mountains and the mystery of ancient tombs. Through Feb. 28. (275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)

Robert Williams—Grandiloquently titled oils ("The Avatar of Inequity," "The Myth of the Proletariat King," "Harvesting Ectoplasm off the Evil Ghost of a Dead Monkey") painted in a friendly blend of embroidery-kit brushstrokes, kitchen-sink realism, Little Annie Fanny sexuality, album-cover apocalypticism, and general adolescent miscreancy. Through Jan. 31. (Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. 274-9300.)

Group Show—Every selection in this eclectic, handsome show is a pleasure to take in, from Barbara Hepworth's "Kyoto," two exquisite sleek white marbles, to Donald Judd's impeccable pair of brushed-aluminum boxes with inset panels of cherry-red Plexiglas to Lucas Samaras's diptych ornamented with yarn, beautifully cut pieces of mirror, and, of course, the sharpest of little nails. Through Jan. 24. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)



Three photographs from the series "Shadows, 1951," by Marvin E. Newman, at De Lellis.

Short List—**RITA ACKERMANN**, Rosen, 130 Prince St. 941-0203. Through Feb. 7. . . . **SQUEAK CARNWATH**, Beitzel, 102 Prince St. 219-2863. Through Feb. 14. . . . **HANNE DARBOVEN**, Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through Feb. 7. . . . **ECKHARD ETZOLD**, Au Base, 433 W. 14th St. 414-0563. Through Feb. 8. . . . **PAUL FORTE**, Foster, 62 Crosby St. 966-9024. Through Jan. 31. . . . **PAMELA FRASER**, Kaplan, 48 Greene St. 226-6131. Through Feb. 21. . . . **ELLIOTT GREEN** and **CHRISTIAN SCHUMANN**, Postmasters, 80 Greene St. 941-5711. Both shows through Feb. 7. . . . **CAMERON JAMIE**, Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through Feb. 11. . . . **WILLIAM KENTRIDGE**, The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166. Open Wednesday evenings until 8; through Feb. 14. . . . **LYNN MC CARTY**, Hoffman, 429 West Broadway. 966-6676. Through Feb. 3. . . . **NICHOLAS MICROS**, Trans Hudson, 416 W. 13th St. 242-3232. Through Feb. 7. . . . **JEANNE RISICA AND RON OTTAVIANO**, Dillon, 431 West Broadway. 966-2977. Through Feb. 9. . . . **ANDY WARHOL**, Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through March 14. . . . **CINDY WORKMAN**, Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012. Through Jan. 31. . . . **MICHAEL ZWACK**, Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through Feb. 7.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Winter Antiques Show—The forty-fourth installment of the upscale classic continues through Jan. 25. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. For information, call 472-1180.)

Outsider Art Fair—This Sanford Smith show has become a must for those attracted to the work of artists who rely more on intuition than on training. (Puck Building, Houston and Lafayette Sts. Jan. 23-25, with a benefit preview on Jan. 22. For information, call 777-5218.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Andreas Feininger—Feininger's emphasis on "clarity, simplicity, and organization" is evident even in his early, experimental work from the thirties, a good selection of which is on view here. Through Jan. 24. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)

Marvin E. Newman—The inaugural exhibition of the Keith De Lellis gallery features "Shadows, 1951," a series of pictures made on the streets of Chicago by this somewhat overlooked veteran photographer. Through Jan. 31. (47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.)

Richard Rothman—"Shrubs," a selection of photographs taken over a six-year period, which superbly illuminate our relationship with the often meagre landscape of New York City and its environs. The first picture you see, in the gallery's stairwell, is the most dramatic: a two-trunked front-yard birch has been polled at about seven feet and adorned with cloth markers that look like pathetic, useless bandages; the gently understated title, "Pruned Birch with Ribbons," only intensifies the grisliness. In another mesmerizing picture, a weeping blue cypress sits on its root ball at a Long Island nursery, its branches outstretched as if to say, "I've been ready for a while." The rest of the two dozen clear-eyed images here are less poetic but sometimes more hopeful. Through Feb. 7. (Sorokko, 430 West Broadway. 941-8888.)

Arne Svenson / Penelope Umbrico—Highly seductive prints of prisoners, from the artist's collection of early-twentieth-century glass-plate mug shots. / New abstract work whose subject is mail-order catalogues. Both shows through Feb. 21. (Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747.)

"About Painting, Part III"—The final installment of this series features work by Susan Derges, Vera Lutter, Walter Niedermayr, and Frederic Ohringer. Through Jan. 24. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454.)

"The Cottingley Fairies and Other Apparitions"—The sprites the title alludes to were the creations of two young cousins, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, who, in 1917, in their West Yorkshire hamlet, produced two photographs, each of a winged being prancing beside a young girl. (The cousins happily confessed to their hoax in 1982.) In addition, the show presents "spirit" photographs from the nineteenth century and works by a great lineup of artists, including Eugène Atget, Jacques Henri Lartigue, James Van Der Zee, Duane Michals, Vik Muniz, and Nancy Burson. Through Feb. 21. (Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450.)

"Early Visions: 19th Century Photographs"—A winning selection of albumen and salt prints, none dating from later than the eighteen-eighties. The textures of tree branches, grass, and stone crackle in a Gustave Le Gray view of Fontainebleau Forest; an ashy mist envelops Burmese pagodas in an image by Linnaeus Tripe; a marshman poles a skiff in a painterly étude by Peter Henry Emerson. Other wonderful pictures are by such innovators and masters as Julia Margaret Cameron, Ernest Benecke, Felice Beato, Carleton Watkins, Roger Fenton, and Édouard Baldus. Through Jan. 24. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223.)

"Male"—A show of ruminations on the masculine in photographs and other mediums, curated by *Village Voice* photography critic and art editor Vince Aletti. Among the artists represented are Wilhelm von Gloeden, Cecil Beaton, Jean Cocteau, Sally Mann, John Dugdale, Rosalind Solomon, Tseng Kwong Chi, and David Wojnarowicz. Through Feb. 22. (Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays.)

"The 19th-Century Painted Photograph"—Hand-painted family-portrait and postmortem tintypes, as well as salt, albumen, and gelatin-silver prints. Through Feb. 7. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.)

"With and Without Gravity"—A show of all the pictures in the new issue (No. 10) of the journal *Blind Spot*. Among the artists are Gregory Crewdson, Martin Parr, Lou Reed, Richard Misrach, Marilyn Bridges, and Dennis Hopper. Through Feb. 17. (SoHo Triad Fine Arts, 107 Grand St. 965-9500. Open daily.)

International Center of Photography—"Nelly: From Athens to New York, the Work of Elli Seraïdari." . . . ¶ "Images from the Machine Age: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection." Both shows through Feb. 22. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"Weegee's World: Life, Death and the Human Drama," a two-hundred-picture exhibition that spans the tabloid photographer's career. Through March 8. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI**, McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. 319-1996. Open Mondays; through Feb. 7. . . . **PAUL CAPONIGRO**, Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through Feb. 14. . . . **MARGARET COURTNEY-CLARKE** and **TESSA TRAEGER**, Witkin, 415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Both shows through Jan. 24. . . . **BENEDICT J. FERNANDEZ**, Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through Jan. 24. . . . **JOAN FONTCUBERTA**, Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through Jan. 31. . . . **JAN GROOVER**, Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Feb. 21. . . . **YEVGENY KHALDEI**, Schickler, 560 Broadway. 431-6363. Through Feb. 21. . . . **RANDY WEST**, Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Through Feb. 21. . . . **CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS**, Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through Feb. 7.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Public Library.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall is 247-7800, and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—Strauss's **capriccio**, with Kiri Te Kanawa, Kathryn Harries, David Kuebler, Simon Keenlyside, Wolfgang Brendel, and Jan-Hendrik Rootering; conducted by Andrew Davis. (Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 26 at 7:30.) . . . **il trovatore**, with Maria Spacagna, Dolora Zajick, Richard Margison, and Juan Pons; Simone Young. (Jan. 22 at 7:30) . . . With Barbara Dever instead of Ms. Zajick. (Jan. 27 at 8.) . . . **l'elisir d'amore**, with Ruth Ann Swenson, Luciano Pavarotti, Earle Patriarco, and Paul Plishka; Maurizio Benini. (Jan. 23 at 8.) . . . **la cenerentola**, with Jennifer Larmore, Ramón Vargas, Alessandro Corbelli, Simone Alaimo, and Michele Pertusi; James Levine. (Jan. 24 at 1:30.) . . . **die zauberflöte**, with Barbara Bonney, Mary Dunleavy, Frank Lopardo, Gerald Finley, John Cheek, and Franz Hawlata; Edo de Waart. (Jan. 24 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

"Ariodante"—Handel's 1735 opera, in a semi-staged performance by students from the Manhattan School of Music. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 26 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Leonard Slatkin conducts Schuman's "New England Triptych," Joseph Schwantner's Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra (featuring the orchestra's principal percussionist, Christopher Lamb), the première of John Zorn's "Orchestra Variations," and Copland's complete ballet score for "Billy the Kid." (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 22-24 at 8 and Jan. 27 at 7:30. . . . **note:** Mr. Slatkin also oversees a Young People's Concert on Jan. 24 at 2.)

New York Chamber Sinfonia—Presenting four works by Corigliano. (Winter Garden, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. Jan. 21 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

Israel Philharmonic Orchestra—Kurt Masur, who was named the orchestra's honorary guest conductor in 1992, leads Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the New York Choral Artists, the American Boychoir, and soloists Sylvia McNair (soprano), Annette Markert (alto), John Aler (tenor), and Thomas Hampson (baritone). (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra—"Elegies," Richard Danielpour's five-movement symphony cum song cycle, is based on the true story of the mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade's quest to learn about her father, an army lieutenant who was killed by a land mine just before her birth, in 1945; the text, based on letters the singer's parents wrote each other during the Second World War, is by the poet Kim Vaeth. This performance features Ms. von Stade and baritone Thomas Hampson as soloists. Also on the program are Mozart's Symphony No. 32, several of his concert arias (with Ms. von Stade), and Schumann's Symphony No. 2. Roger Nierenberg conducts. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 22 at 8.)

Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich—David Zinman conducts the Prelude and "Liebestod" from Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde," Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Yefim Bronfman), and Dvořák's Symphony No. 8. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 23 at 8.)

Jupiter Symphony—Jens Nygaard conducts Franz von Suppé's "Light Cavalry" Overture, Debussy's Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra (featuring Makiko Hirata), and Bruch's little-played Violin Concerto No. 2 (with Paul Rosenthal). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Jan. 26 at 2 and 7 and Jan. 27 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

RECITALS

Juilliard String Quartet—The foursome offers quartets by Mendelssohn (in E-Flat Major, Op. 12, No. 1), Copland, and Schubert (the "Death and the Maiden"). (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Jan. 21 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Gregory Fulkerson—The violinist plays Ives's Sonata No. 4, Adams's "Road Movies," and Glass's "Knee Play No. 2" (from "Einstein on the Beach"), as well as Bach's D-Minor Partita for Unaccompanied Violin. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Violinist Scott St. John, cellist Alban Gerhardt, and pianist William Wolfram offer trios by Beethoven (in E-Flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2) and Dvořák (in F Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Jan. 22 at 7:30 and Jan. 25 at 4.)

New York Philomusica—The chamber ensemble offers an all-Brahms concert, comprising his G-Major Violin Sonata, his B-Major Piano Trio, and his Clarinet Quintet. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 22 at 8.)

Sharp/Denk Duo—Violinist Robin Sharp and pianist Jeremy Denk perform sonatas by Beethoven, Debussy, Zwilich, and Prokofiev. (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 23 at 8.)

"Music from Nature"—This week, the Kitchen invites audiences to investigate ways that electronic technology might be used to derive music from the natural landscape. Jan. 23 at 8: David Toop's "Ocean Sound" and David Rothenberg's "Unamuno." . . . ¶ Jan. 24: A panel discussion (at 11 a.m.), an ethnomusicological lecture (at 2), a natural-sound-recording workshop (at 4), and a concert of music by Doug Quin, Sarah Peebles, and Jaron Lanier (at 8). . . . **note:** From Jan. 21 to Jan. 23, the Kitchen's installation gallery will be given over to a multimedia work involving digital soundscapes from a park in Vancouver, British Columbia. (512 W. 19th St. 255-5793.)

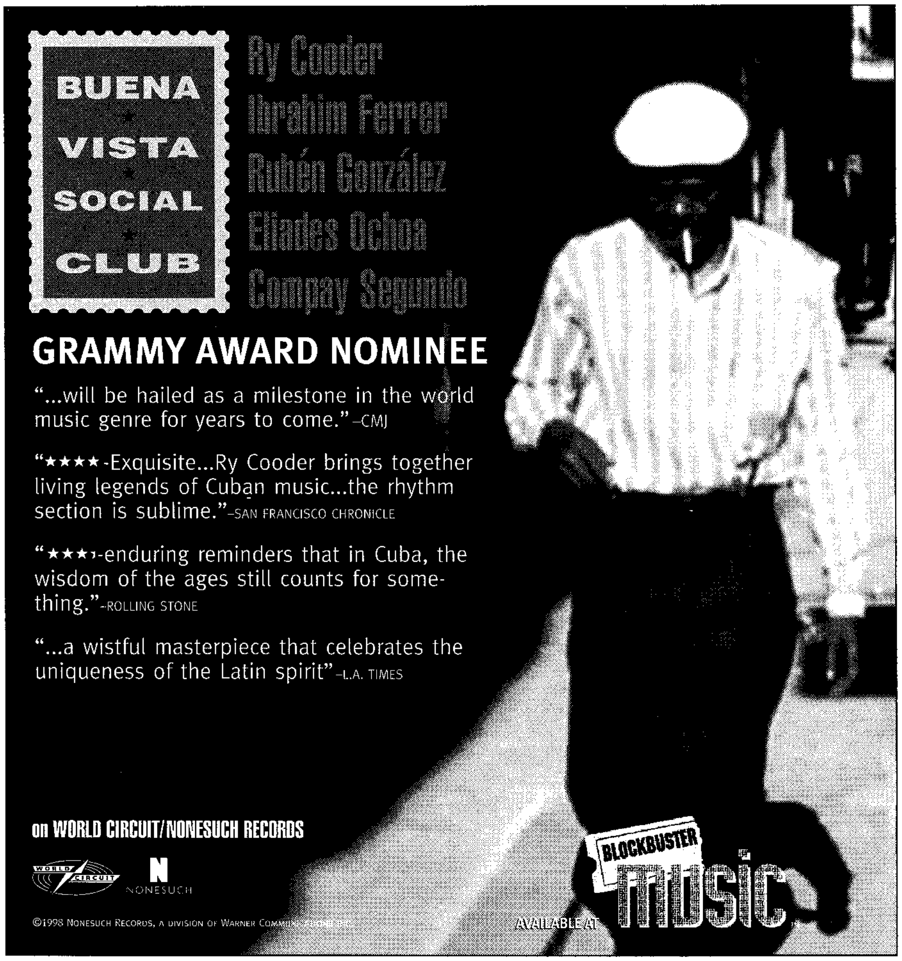
Focus! 1998—This year, Juilliard's annual festival of twentieth-century music centers on recent works from Scandinavia. Jan. 23 at 8: Joel Sachs leads the New Juilliard Ensemble in works by Áskell Másson (from Iceland), Rolf Wallin (Norway), Anders Hillborg (Sweden), Karl Aage Rasmussen (Denmark), and Magnus Lindberg (Finland). (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 8: Chamber works by Kaija Saariaho and Per Nørgård, among others. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St.) . . . ¶ Jan. 27 at 8: Chamber pieces by Steen Pade, Atli Ingolfson, and others, preceded (at 7) by a round-table discussion. (Juilliard Theatre. For information about free tickets, which are required for all events, call 769-7406. The festival continues through Jan. 30.)

Operatic Potpourri—A benefit recital, featuring soprano Ruth Ann Swenson, mezzo-sopranos Marilyn Horne and Susan Quittmeyer, bass James Morris, and pianist Warren Jones. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 428. Jan. 24 at 7.)

Chamber Music Society of the Institute—Soprano Oksana Krovytska, pianist Mykola Suk, the Leontovych String Quartet, and several colleagues offer chamber works with a Ukrainian connection, including Loeffler's "Ukrainian Evenings" (here in the première of an unpublished version for violin and piano), Liszt's "Ballade Ukraine," Rachmaninoff's Romances (on poems by Taras Shevchenko), and Beethoven's Third "Razumovsky" Quartet. (Ukrainian Institute, 2 E. 79th St. 288-8660. Jan. 24 at 8.)

Joseph Kalichstein—The pianist performs C. P. E. Bach's Variations on "La Folia," Schumann's "Kreisleriana," Mendelssohn's F-Sharp-Minor Fantasia (plus a handful of his "Songs Without Words"), and Liszt's "Spanish Rhapsody." (Washington Irving High School, Irving Pl. at 16th St. Jan. 24 at 8. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

Hei-Kyung Hong—This luminous soprano offers songs by Strauss, Schubert, Honegger, Poulenc, and Barber, as well as folk songs from her native Korea. Pianist Brian Zeger assists. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Jan. 25 at 2.)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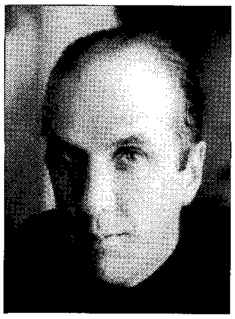

Author David Bowman will read from and sign copies of his new novel, *Bunny Modern*, a hard-boiled comedy about love, abduction and child care.

Buzz Bissinger

Friday, January 30th, 7:30-8:30 PM
Upper West Side, 2289 Broadway at 82nd Street
Reading • Signing

Bestselling nonfiction author Buzz Bissinger will read from and sign copies of *A Prayer for the City: A True Story of a Mayor and Five Heroes in a Race Against Time.*

Anna Quindlen

Monday, February 2nd, 7:30-8:30 PM
Union Square, 33 East 17th Street
Reading • Signing

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and bestselling author Anna Quindlen will read from and sign copies of her new novel, *Black and Blue*, in which a marriage that begins in passion becomes violent.

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JACQUES THIBAUD STRING TRIO—In its New York début recital, the Berlin-based ensemble performs trios by Beethoven, Reger, and Mozart. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Jan. 25 at 5.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER—The Society concludes its monthlong investigation of turn-of-the-century scores. Jan. 25 at 5: String quartets by Stravinsky (his "Three Pieces" and his Concertino), Webern ("Five Movements"), Berg, and Schoenberg (his Second), played by the Orion String Quartet, with soprano Benita Valente assisting in the Schoenberg. . . . ¶ Jan. 27 at 7:30: Violinist Thomas Zehetmair and pianist David Golub perform sonatas by Debussy, Elgar, and Strauss, in addition to Webern's "Four Pieces" (Op. 7). (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050.)

RADU LUPU—The distinguished pianist performs Schumann's "Faschingsschwank aus Wien," Janáček's "Sonata 1.x.1905," Bartók's "Out of Doors," and Schubert's C-Minor Sonata (D. 958). (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 26 at 7:30.)

CYGNUS ENSEMBLE—The modern-music group, with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, performs works by Wuorinen, Stravinsky, William Anderson, Ursula Mamlok, Robert Pollock, and Joyce Orenstein. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 27 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE PAPER BAG PLAYERS—Since Judith Martin co-founded this troupe, in 1958, its actors have used little more than brown wrapping paper, cardboard, crayons, paint, and their own writing and acting talents to keep the four-to-nine-year-old set amused. For their fortieth anniversary season, they present "The Big Sleep Over," a collection of short plays written and directed by Martin. The actors start the play in a great big bed, but before it's over, they've wrestled with pirates, sung with polar bears, and, of course, had a pillow fight. Bob Rogers, the Players' one-man band, accompanies them on the electric piano, performing Donald Ashwander's ragtime score. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Opens Jan. 24 at 2 and continues, Saturdays and Sundays at 2, through March 8.)

READINGS—Jan. 21 at 6:30: An evening of classical drama, read by poets and translators Rachel Hadas, Mark Rudman, Armand Schwerner, and David R. Slavitt, from their recent renditions of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus. (Century Association, 7 W. 43rd St. For reservations, which are required, call 215-898-6263.) . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 7: By Ed Sanders, poet and founder of the rock group the Fugs, from his memoir, "Tales of Beatnik Glory"; Lynne Tillman, from her novel, "No Lease on Life"; and Alexandra Auder, daughter of Warhol superstar Viva, from her roman à clef, "The Thousand Islands." (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: By Jimmy Breslin and other writers, from Bernadette Devlin's 1969 autobiography, "The Price of My Soul." (Rocky Sullivan's Pub, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS—Jan. 22 at 6: Bernhard Schlink, author of the novel "The Reader," joins writers Daniel J. Goldhagen ("Hitler's Willing Executioners") and Tina Rosenberg ("The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism") and Cardozo School of Law professor Richard H. Weisberg to discuss postwar Germany and the Holocaust. (Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University, 55 Fifth Ave, at 12th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 6:30: The winners of the 1997 National Book Awards—novelist Charles Frazier ("Cold Mountain"), historian Joseph J. Ellis ("American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson"), poet William Meredith ("Effort at Speech"), and children's-book author Han Nolan ("Dancing on the Edge")—chat about the writing life and take questions from the audience. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. For reservations, which are required, call 328-3076.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Bittersweet History

Hugh Thomas

THE historian Hugh Thomas, author of **CUBA: OR THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM** (1971; to be republished this spring by Da Capo Press), believes there has not yet been a truly good account of the Cuban Revolution and what's happened in that country over the past thirty years. "I don't think anyone has really taken in the tragedy of the fact that it started so well, and everyone seemed to be so enthusiastic in 1959—how it's turned sour and become very unpredictable since the collapse of the Soviet Union," he says. "It's a wonderful subject for someone with a lot of patience."

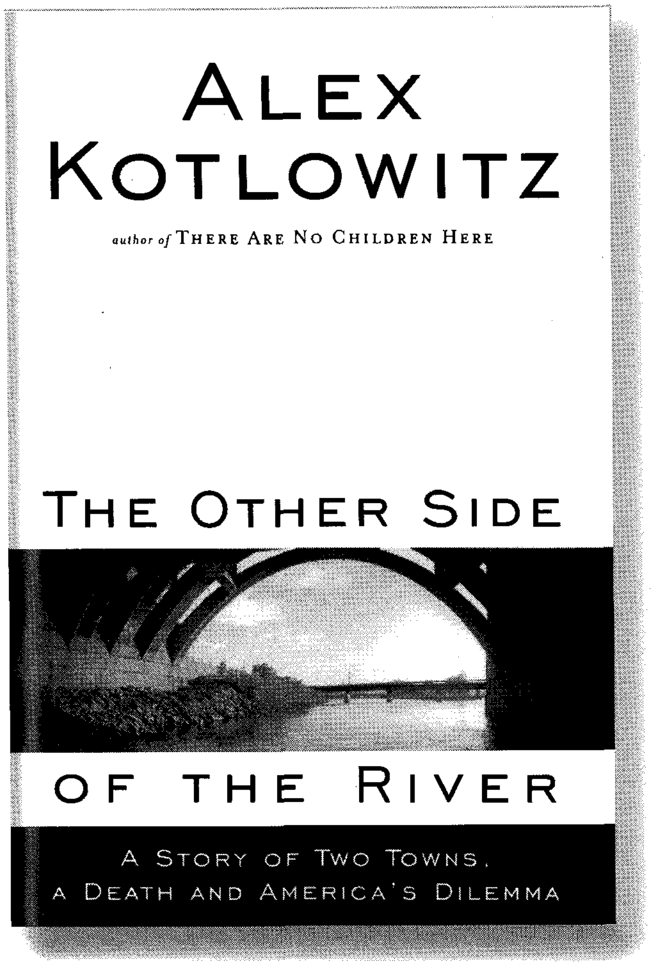
"Cuba: Or the Pursuit of Freedom" traces the history of Cuba from the eighteenth century to the nineteen-fifties. Thomas's latest book, **THE SLAVE TRADE** (Simon & Schuster), chronicles that enterprise from the earliest Portuguese expeditions in Africa to its ultimate decline, in Cuba and Brazil in the eighteen-sixties. For an examination of Cuba's efforts to overcome racial difficulties, he recommends Fernando Ortiz's **CUBAN COUNTERPOINT** (Duke University Press), which "reminds us that however unsuccessful the Cubans have been in their political and economic lives, they have actually reached a certain sort of understanding, both before the Revolution and since, of how to have harmony between black and white."

Thomas cites two novels that impressively capture the life of Cuba: **THE LOST STEPS** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), by Alejo Carpentier, who Thomas feels is the best modern Cuban writer; and Guillermo Cabrera Infante's **THREE TRAPPED TIGERS** (Faber & Faber), which "gives us an impression of what life was like in the last years of the old regime." Cuba's role as a sugar producer is another integral part of its story. Thomas calls Manuel Moreno Fraginals's **EL INGENIO** (published in English as "The Sugarmill" by the Monthly Review Press; out of print), a history of the Cuban sugar industry, a masterpiece. And Roland T. Ely's **CUANDO REINABA SU MAJESTAD EL AZÚCAR** (in Spanish; out of print) "reminds us that there was a time when Cuba was really very well off. It was one of the richest colonies in the world, if not the richest. It was better off than Spain in some ways: it had railways before Spain. It was a prosperous place, like so many of the other Caribbean islands were in the golden age of sugar."

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

TWO TOWNS. TWO RACES. ONE MURDER.

A POWERFUL NEW WORK BY BESTSELLING AUTHOR ALEX KOTLOWITZ.


ALEX KOTLOWITZ
author of THERE ARE NO CHILDREN HERE
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER
A STORY OF TWO TOWNS, A DEATH AND AMERICA'S DILEMMA

The Other Side of the River
by Alex Kotlowitz

Alex Kotlowitz became a trusted voice on the subject of race in America with his bestselling *There Are No Children Here.* Now he brings his compassionate perspective to a powerful portrayal of two racially divergent Michigan towns. Through painstaking reporting, Kotlowitz depicts the lives and hopes of the towns' citizens as they wrestle with the unsolved murder of a black teenage boy. Beautifully written, this gripping and profound book reveals the attitudes and misperceptions that undermine race relations throughout America. (Nan A. Talese)

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THE MOVIES

OPENINGS

Fallen Angels—The Hong Kong writer-director Wong Kar-Wai's tale of a hit man (Leon Lai) who wants to quit. In Cantonese. Opening Jan. 21. (Film Forum.)

The Gingerbread Man—A thriller about a Savannah lawyer (Kenneth Branagh) whose life and family are threatened by a lunatic and a hurricane. Based on a story by John Grisham. Directed by Robert Altman. Opening Jan. 23.

Phantoms—A supernatural thriller directed by Joe Chappelle. Starring Peter O'Toole, Joanna Going, and Rose McGowan. Opening Jan. 23. (Chelsea Cinema, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Gotham Cinema, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Slappy and the Stinkers—Five smart seven-year-olds plot to release a sea lion from the aquarium, in an adventure directed by Barnet Kellman. Opening Jan. 23.

Spice World—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 23. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Swept from the Sea—An adaptation of Joseph Conrad's short story "Amy Foster," about a young English servant girl (Rachel Weisz) and a mysterious stranger (Vincent Perez). Directed by Beeban Kidron. Opening Jan. 23. (Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Afterglow—The still-radiant Julie Christie stars in the improbable role of a former B-movie actress married to a small-time handyman (Nick Nolte) who dabbles big-time in infidelity. She lolls in her bathrobe, watching old movies of herself, while he tools around Montreal in his red van, fixing the apartments and the love lives of his female clients. He gets involved with a fetching young thing (Lara Flynn Boyle) married to a caricature of a career-obsessed yuppie (Jonny Lee Miller), and the yuppie picks up Christie at a hotel bar; all manner of droll carryings-on ensue, leading to a final scene in which Christie's coolly ironic persona gives way to a startling—and uncharacteristic—display of raw emotion. Written and directed by Alan Rudolph, who can't seem to decide whether the film is a highly stylized French farce or a Pinteresque drama of disconnection.—*Daphne Merkin* (1/19/98) (Angelika Film Center and Regency.)

Amistad—The title ship was the site of an 1839 rebellion in which a gang of slaves overpowered the crew and demanded their return to Africa. The uprising provides Steven Spielberg with the first and most potent scene of his new picture; the violence is wonderfully balanced between brutishness and the lust for liberty, and the rest of the story flows from that mixture. The men are tricked into landing on the coast of Connecticut, and the audience, too, is in for a shock: from here on, the movie becomes a seminar on property law—where, and to whom, do the defendants belong? A young attorney (Matthew McConaughey) argues their case, which then proceeds to the Supreme Court, where the rebel leader (Djimon Hounsou) is represented by a former President, John Quincy Adams (Anthony Hopkins). Hounsou has forbidding presence—more than the hammy Hopkins—but there is only so much that Spielberg, for all his skill, can do to relieve the burden of the double courtroom drama, and this wordy, noble film runs dry of visual surprise. With Morgan Freeman as an abolitionist and Nigel Hawthorne as Martin Van Buren.—*Anthony Lane* (Coronet Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

As Good as It Gets—A romantic comedy directed and co-written (with Mark Andrus) by James Brooks ("Terms of Endearment," "Broadcast News"), in which an improbable trio—quartet, if you count the dog—overcomes a heap of troubles and finds collective happiness, sitcom style. Jack Nicholson stars as a romance novelist with an obsessive-compulsive disorder and a seriously alienating manner, Helen Hunt is a waitress with a young son who has a life-threatening disease, and Greg Kinnear is a gay painter with a sweet smile and no visible erotic attachments (not to mention the dog, a Brussels griffon who links the threesome together with his big-eyed adorableness). Brooks's gleaming manipulativeness and trendy pieties may make you grumpy; you keep expecting to hear a laugh track.—*D.M.* (1/5/98) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

Blood and Sand (1922)—Rudolph Valentino won some of his best reviews as a poor boy from Seville who achieves fame and fortune in the bullring but loses his soul somewhere between the "good love" of his childhood sweetheart (Lila Lee) and the "bad love" of a decadent aristocrat (Nita Naldi). The movie has its confused, ludicrous aspects, including a "student of humanity" (Charles Belcher) who comments on the action in his notebook and might have served as the inspiration for Bela Lugosi's narrator in "Glen or Glenda." But the way Valentino plays the sensual, sometimes petulant male ingénue is fascinating—fresh and funny as well as tormented. June Mathis wrote the script, from the novel by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. Fred Niblo directed.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 26.)

The Boxer—The director-and-actor team of Jim Sheridan and Daniel Day-Lewis are back on the troubled Irish turf of "In the Name of the Father," but this time the rigid demarcation lines of internecine strife have softened. Day-Lewis plays Danny Flynn, a former I.R.A. recruit who returns to Belfast after fourteen years in prison and rebuilds a community boxing club in the hope of uniting Protestants and Catholics. Along the way he takes up with a youthful flame (Emily Watson, of "Breaking the Waves") now married to his best friend; the lovers cleave to each other in the face of warnings and bloody recriminations from Flynn's former terrorist comrades. The movie is stronger on atmosphere (the whole thing is wonderfully lit, as if by flares) than on specifics, but the quiet intensity of Day-Lewis's performance gives it genuine force.—*D.M.* (1/19/98) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Waverly.)

Deconstructing Harry—Woody Allen casts himself as a famous Jewish novelist who ridicules and cheats on women and then appropriates their life stories for his fiction. As a director, Allen seems to be shooting for a new style of ruthless honesty: the film's tone is almost abusively dark. But clear away the pseudoprofound talk about the immorality of genius and all you're left with is a bunch of celebrity cameos and outdated gags.—*Sarah Kerr* (Criterion Center, East 85th Street, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

Fallen—Apocalyptic fluff starring Denzel Washington as a cop who has sent a killer to the electric chair; it turns out that the killer was inhabited by a vengeful fallen angel whose spirit moves from person to person. The demon could be posing as an old lady, a yuppie father, a child: the only clues are that it's left-handed and it likes to sing "Time Is on My Side." There's a crazy democratic horror in the idea that anyone on the street might be a temporary host for evil, and the scenes of the cop standing, terrified, in the middle of a crowd work up a nice, campy dread. But Nicholas Kazan's script doesn't carry this wild conceit far enough. Everything about the film is too cautious—including Washington, who does his usual turn as a sober and moral man, when what you want is to see him deeply rattled. Directed by Gregory Hoblit.—*S.K.* (Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Gonin—The Japanese director Takashi Ishii's brutal, hyperstylized, hallucinogenic film takes a group of five desperate men through the robbery of a gangster's headquarters and the bloody revenge that follows. Ishii has cast some of his country's coolest actors—Naoto Takenaka ("Shall We Dance?") and Takeshi Kitano ("Sonatine") among them—and his fluid, sensual camerawork creates sequences of balletlike violence that would do De Palma proud. (At one point, a bodyguard removes his bullet-proof vest and uses it like a bullfighter's cape to dodge flying bullets). But what really raises this film above the standard yakuza flick is the scruffy characters: one-eyed hit men, gay hustlers, and ex-cops give the film an eccentric neo-noir atmosphere that makes this nihilistic caper film riveting. In Japanese.—*Bruce Diones* (Cinema Village.)

Good Will Hunting—In which Matt Damon demonstrates his purchase on star power by giving Robin Williams a run for his money when it comes to holding audience interest. Damon plays Will Hunting, a belligerent working-class genius from South Boston who's been abused in foster homes and is now being given a chance to triumph over his past; Williams is the maverick shrink who helps him understand his demons, and Minnie Driver is the unsnobbish Harvard girlfriend who tries to heal him with acceptance. If it sounds treacly, it's not, thanks to a honed script (co-written by Damon and Ben Affleck, who plays Will's best pal) and subtle performances. Flecked with humor as well as sentiment, it's been directed with surprising warmth by Gus Van Sant. This remarkably uncynical and un-Gen-X-ish movie is about learning to trust when you've been given no reason to; unless you're committed to the Quentin Tarantino Weltanschauung, you won't come away unmoved.—*D.M.* (1/19/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and State.)

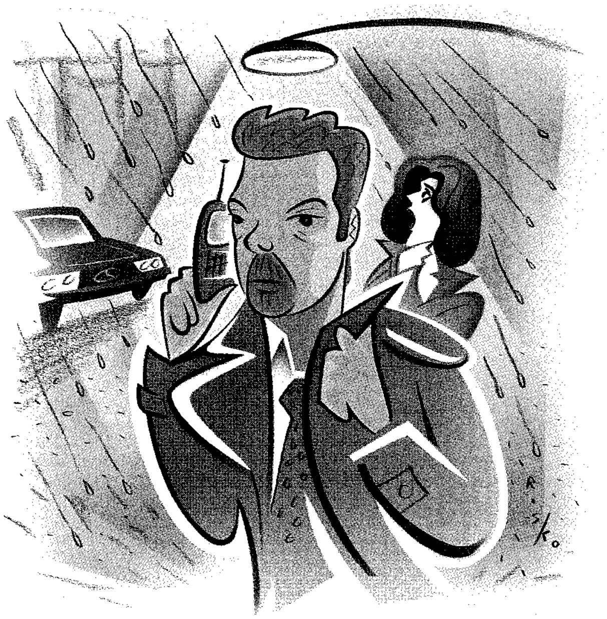
Jackie Brown—Despite the usual armory of guns and foul mouths, Quentin Tarantino's third movie marks a change in direction. Pam Grier plays a flight attendant who gets caught smuggling cash; the feds will be nice to her only if she helps them hook a bigger fish, an arms dealer named Ordell (Samuel L. Jackson). Also involved are Ordell's girl (Bridget Fonda), his shaggy friend (Robert De Niro), and a level-headed bail bondsman (Robert Forster). Tarantino adapted the script from Elmore Leonard's novel "Rum Punch," and he's tuned straight into the Leonard wavelength, with its buzz of ambition and failure. The halting attempts at intimacy—notably between Grier and Forster—are something wholly new to Tarantino, and all the more touching for being so tacky. The movie is set in the present but infected with seventies chic; funk lovers will hear the soundtrack and weep.—*A.L.* (1/12/98) (84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Gotham Cinema; through Jan. 22.)

King Solomon's Mines (1937)—In this roistering black-and-white version of H. Rider Haggard's African adventure novel, Cedric Hardwicke, as the great white hunter Allan Quartermain, supplies a saturnine wit, and Paul Robeson, as the exiled prince Umbopa, an expansive spirit; together with the roving-eyed director, Robert Stevenson, they make the whole outlandish search for Solomon's lost diamonds both diverting and stirring. Robeson's mammoth good humor mitigates the awkwardness of having Umbopa sing plantation-style spirituals, and the prince's plumed tribesmen—especially the evil one-eyed king (Robert Adams)—are an imposing lot. If any group has a right to cry prejudice, it's the Irish: the filmmakers concoct a blarneying father-and-daughter team (Arthur Sinclair and Anna Lee) and chalk up their crooked, charming ways to their Hibernian ancestry. Roland Young is skittishly amusing as the proper Englishman Commander Good.—*M.S.* (Film Forum 2; Jan. 21-22.)

Kundun—Martin Scorsese's examination of the early life of the Dalai Lama starts out like a magisterial John Ford Western, with a lone horseman crossing the parched plains of Tibet in search of the little boy who is the latest reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion. Then it turns into a story of spiritual education, and, finally—as Mao's forces attack and the twenty-four-year-old must decide whether to stay and face certain murder or flee to India—into a drama of political conscience. The film is far too long, and viewers may be frustrated by its frequently shifting tone; yet, in a way, a shifting tone is just the right treatment for a religion that emphasizes serene detachment over emotion. Scorsese and his screenwriter, Melissa Mathison, are especially brave in handling their exotic subject without the plot crutch of a Western outsider to interpret everything for the audience. The director is inspired by the mandalas that the monks craft out of brightly colored sand, and, visually, this may be his richest feast since "Raging Bull."—*S.K.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Guild, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

Live Flesh—In the writer and director Pedro Almodóvar's latest film, Liberto Rabal plays a young man who has been framed and sent to prison for seven years. In Spanish. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Oscar and Lucinda—The title of Gillian Armstrong's politely beautiful version of the Peter Carey novel refers to a pair of eccentric Victorians, the saintly Oscar (Ralph Fiennes) and the wealthy Lucinda (Cate Blanchett), who share vivid red



Opening Jan. 23, Kenneth Branagh and Embeth Davidtz in Robert Altman's "The Gingerbread Man."

ROBERT RISKO

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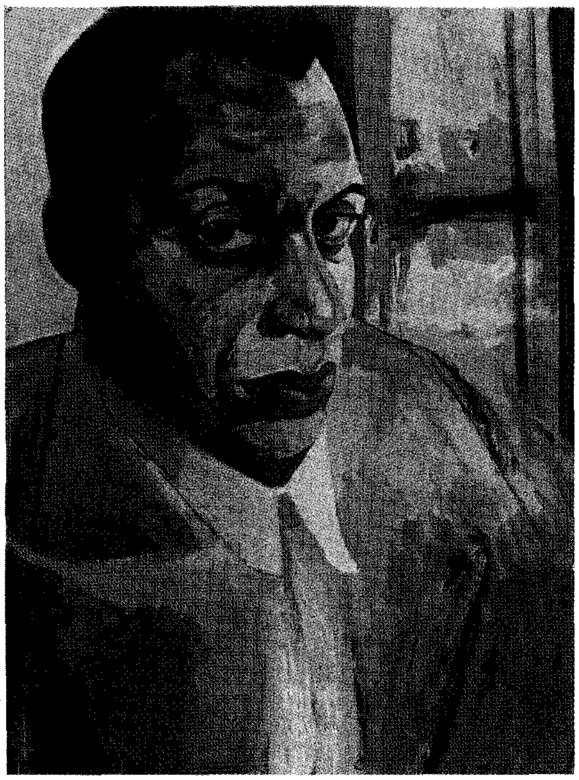
hair and a weakness for gambling but never a bed. The theme of narrowly avoided love may have a certain delicacy on the page, but it leaves the film looking aimless: the characters' obsessions flare up out of nowhere, and the climactic journey, in which Oscar transports a glass church across the Australian outback, feels like a willful gesture toward the surreal. (Fortunately, both Blanchett and Fiennes stress the nervous comedy of the situation.) The movie may be lovely, but it doesn't play to Armstrong's strengths; wasn't this tale a natural for the more skewed vision of Jane Campion? With Ciaran Hinds and a voice-over narration by Geoffrey Rush.—*A.L.* (1/12/98) (Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 72nd Street East.)

Sanders of the River (1935)—One of those all-for-the-glory-of-the-British-Empire specials. Paul Robeson plays Bosambo, a trustworthy Congo chieftain, so loyal to the British that he helps the colonial officials crush a native revolt. Robeson, who had apparently expected this English film—an Alexander Korda production, directed by Zoltán Korda—to have a very different point of view, fought its release. However, despite the junkiness of the Edgar Wallace story on which it is based, and despite the flagrant racism of the noble-savage conception, Robeson himself has a nobility that transcends the picture's terms. He's magnificently stirring in his African bangles, especially when his chants roll out over the waters. Bosambo and Robeson's similar role in "King Solomon's Mines" were among his most popular performances. With the elegant Nina Mae McKinney, and Leslie Banks.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum 2; Jan. 23-24.)



At Film Forum 2, films starring Paul Robeson.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

Show Boat (1936)—This classic musical-melodrama with the Jerome Kern songs and the novelistic Edna Ferber plot, full of heartbreaks and miscegenation and coincidences, is hard to resist in any of its versions. This one from Universal has a believability that was lost in the 1951 M-G-M version. It features Irene Dunne and Allan Jones, but its greatest attractions are Paul Robeson as Joe, singing "Ol' Man River," and the marvellous Julie of Helen Morgan, who sings "Bill" and "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man." James Whale directed, and the cast includes Charles Winninger, Helen Westley, and Hattie McDaniel.—*P.K.* (Film Forum 2; Jan. 25 and Jan. 27.)

Titanic—At well over three hours, James Cameron's grand new picture has plenty of romance to get through before it breaks the vessel in half. Leonardo DiCaprio plays the freewheeling Jack, who wins a steerage ticket and finds himself falling for the wealthy Rose (Kate Winslet), to the disapproval of her mother (Frances Fisher) and her brute of a fiancé (Billy Zane). The social animus of the story, like its imaginative majesty, is Dickensian; this all feels like two hundred million dollars well spent.—*A.L.* (12/15/97) (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Tomorrow Never Dies—A game attempt by director Roger Spottiswoode to wring a little more life out of the James Bond series. Regular fans will be heartened by the presence of several familiar features: the menacing but, on closer inspection, entirely meaningless title; a plot that shows signs of subtlety during the first hour and then collapses into indiscriminate rubble; and the reassuring stack of homicidal toys provided by Q (Desmond Llewelyn). The most enviable toy is a remote-controlled B.M.W. that you drive with a small keypad; Pierce Brosnan, who plays Bond (for the second time), appears to be operated by the same mechanism. Also present are Jonathan Pryce (as a rather underpowered media tyrant), Teri Hatcher (as his doomed wife), and, most entertaining of all, Michelle Yeoh, who does stuff with her heels and elbows that 007 wouldn't dream of trying without a silencer. The trouble is that nobody takes a breather; when action sequences come as thick and fast as this, style—and with it the quaint old notion that Bond could be a source of cool—never gets a foot in the door.—*A.L.* (Chelsea West, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Wag the Dog—Barry Levinson's very savvy comedy about a very insider subject, the politics of spin control, from a screenplay by David Mamet and Hilary Henkin. The premise, conceived with a shrewd awareness that there's no audience quite so lemminglike as one composed of cynical urban sophisticates, involves a Presidential incumbent caught in a sex scandal less than two weeks before Election Day. Robert De Niro plays a Machiavellian spinmeister who devises a fake war and hires a Hollywood producer (Dustin Hoffman) to orchestrate it. The movie is essentially one long joke about the American way of hype: it's very clever, but its tone of gleeful sendup never takes you beyond what you already know.—*D.M.* (1/5/98) (Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Winter Guest—In a small, frozen-over coastal town in Scotland, a mother and daughter (played by Emma Thompson and her real mother, Phyllida Law) spend a day together arguing and chatting, going from mutual exasperation to sudden bouts of fierce affection. The film is a character study imbued with the tender realism of a William Trevor story, and its slow, watchful quality makes everything seem worth paying attention to: the wonderful, washed-out colors of the town, the mournful cawing of seagulls, the pair of elderly women who follow funerals. Directed, with a great calmness of focus, by the actor Alan Rickman, and featuring superb performances by both mother and daughter, this picture has the lingering radiance of art.—*D.M.* (1/5/98) (Paris.)

ALSO PLAYING

BEAN (reviewed in our issue of 11/24/97): Worldwide Cinemas . . . . **BOOGIE NIGHTS** (10/13/97): Eastside Playhouse. . . . **THE DRESS:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **EVE'S BAYOU:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **FIRESTORM:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Waverly. . . . **THE FULL MONTY:** Sutton. . . . **FULL SPEED:** Quad Cinema. . . . **HALF BAKED:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **HARD RAIN:** Art Greenwich Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, and Ziegfeld. . . . **THE ICE STORM** (9/29/97): Quad Cinema. . . . **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ILLTOWN:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **IN & OUT:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **L.A. CONFIDENTIAL** (9/22/97): Art Greenwich Twin, 86th Street East Twin, Lincoln Square, and New York Twin. . . . **MA VIE EN ROSE:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **MOUSEHUNT:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, and 64th and 2nd. . . . **MR. MAGOO:** Embassy 3. . . . **ONE NIGHT STAND:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **STARSHIP TROOPERS:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE SWEET HEREAFTER** (11/24/97): Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **WELCOME TO SARAJEVO** (12/1/97): 62nd and Broadway. . . . **THE WINGS OF THE DOVE** (11/10/97): 59th Street East Cinema.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**THEATRE 2:** A program of films starring Paul Robeson. Jan. 21-22: "King Solomon's Mines" (†) and "Jericho" (1937, Thornton Freeland). . . . Jan. 23-24: "Song of Freedom" (1936, J. Edgar Wills) and "Sanders of the River" (†). . . . Jan. 25 and Jan. 27: "Show Boat" (†) and "Big Fella" (1937, Wills). . . . ¶ Jan. 25 (afternoon only) and Jan. 26: "Way Out West" (1930, Fred Niblo) and "Tell It to the Marines" (1926, George Hill), both with William Haines. . . . **THEATRE 3:** "Don't Look Back" (1967, D. A. Pennebaker).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Jan. 22 at 2:30: "The Cheat" (1915, Cecil B. De Mille; silent) and "Tillie Wakes Up" (1917, Harry Davenport; silent). . . . Jan. 22 at 6: "His Picture in the Papers" (1916, John Emerson; silent) and "Down to Earth" (1917, Emerson; silent). . . . Jan. 22 at 6:30 and Jan. 23 at 3: "In the Name of the Emperor: The Rape of Nanjing" (1995, Christine Choy and Nancy Tong). . . . Jan. 23 at 2:30 and 7: "Strike" (1924, Sergei Eisenstein; silent). . . . Jan. 23 at 6 and 8, Jan. 24 at 2:30 and 5, and Jan. 25 at 1 and 3: Five different programs of animated short films by Faith and/or John Hubley. . . . Jan. 24 at 2: "Lightnin'" (1925, John Ford; silent). . . . Jan. 24 at 5: "Wild and Woolly" (1917, Emerson; silent) and "American Aristocracy" (1916, Lloyd Ingraham; silent). . . . Jan. 25 at 2: "Stella Maris" (1918, Marshall Neilan; silent) and "The Toll of the Sea" (1922, Chester Franklin; silent). . . . Jan. 25 at 5: "The Love Light" (1921, Frances Marion; silent). . . . Jan. 26 at 2:30: "Blood and Sand" (†). . . . Jan. 27 at 2:30: "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (1921, Rex Ingram; silent). . . . Jan. 27 at 6: "The Ten Commandments" (1923, De Mille; silent).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—The Seventh Annual New York Jewish Film Festival. Jan. 21 at 2 and 6:15: "In Our Own Hands" (1948, Chuck Olin). . . . Jan. 21 at 4:15: "Chants of Sand and Stars" (1997, Nicolas Klotz; in French). . . . Jan. 21 at 8:30 and Jan. 22 at 4:15: "Mendel" (1997, Alexander Rosler; in Norwegian). . . . Jan. 22 at 2 and 6:15: "Hollywoodism" (1998, Simcha Jacobovici). . . . Jan. 22 at 8:30: "None Shall Escape" (1944, André de Toth). . . . ¶ A program of Hungarian films; in Hungarian, with English subtitles. Jan. 23 at 2 and Jan. 25 at 9: "Marie, A Hungarian Legend" (1932, Pal Fejos). . . . Jan. 23 at 3:30 and Jan. 24 at 8:30: "A Hungarian Fairy Tale" (1987, Gyula Gazdag). . . . Jan. 23 at 6: "The

Round-Up'' (1965, Miklós Jancsó). . . . Jan. 23 at 8: "The Long Twilight' (1997, Attila Janisch). . . . Jan. 24 at 2: "Gyuri'' (1977, Pal Schiffer). . . . Jan. 24 at 4:15: "Semmelweis'' (1939, de Toth). . . . Jan. 24 at 6:30: "When Joseph Returns'' (1975, Zsolt Kezdi-Kovásc). . . . Jan. 25 at 5: "Golden Man'' (1918, Alexander Korda; silent). . . . Jan. 25 at 7: "Father'' (1966, István Szabó). . . . Jan. 26 at 2 and 6:15: "People of the Mountain'' (1942, István Szots). . . . *Jan. 26 at 4 and 8:15: "Man Under the Bridge''* (1936, Lászlo Vajda).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Four films directed by Ross McElwee. Jan. 24 at 2: "Backyard'' (1984). . . . Jan. 24 at 3:30: "Sherman's March'' (1986). . . . Jan. 25 at 2: "Time Indefinite'' (1993). . . . Jan. 25 at 4:30: "Six O'Clock News'' (1996). Mr. McElwee will be present.

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Jan. 23-24 at 7 and 9 and Jan. 25 at 6:30 and 8:30: "Foreign Land'' (1995, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas). . . . Jan. 23 at 10: "Portrait of Jason'' (1967, Shirley Clarke). . . . Jan. 24 at 5 and Jan. 25 at 4:30: "La Grande Illusion'' (1937, Jean Renoir, in French). . . . Jan. 24 at 6: Short films by Clarke. . . . Jan. 24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 9: "Gravity & Grace'' (1996, Chris Kraus). . . . Jan. 25 at 5: "Ornette: Made in America'' (1986, Clarke). . . . Jan. 25 at 7: Two films starring Taylor Mead. . . . Jan. 27 at 6: "Colonel Redl'' (1985, István Szabó; in German).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 27 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Ridicule'' (1996, Patrice Leconte; in French).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, 2, and 3, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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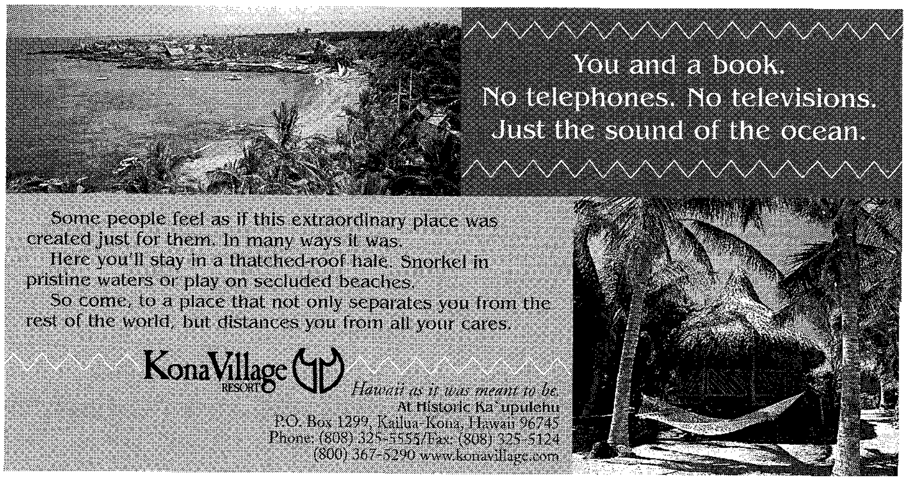

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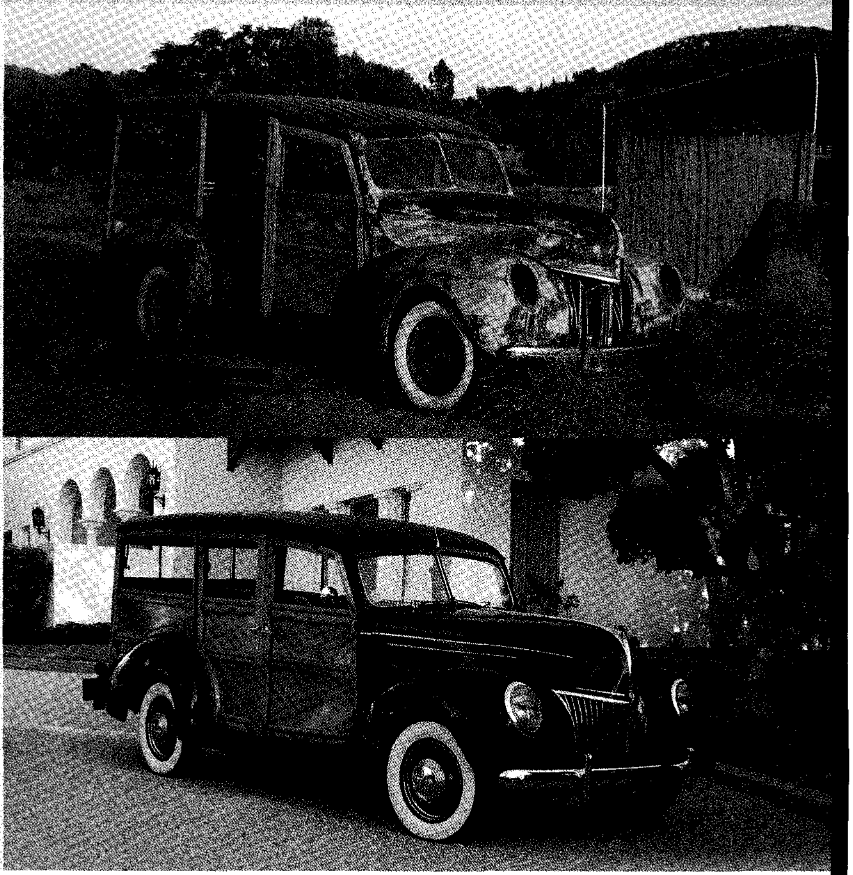

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

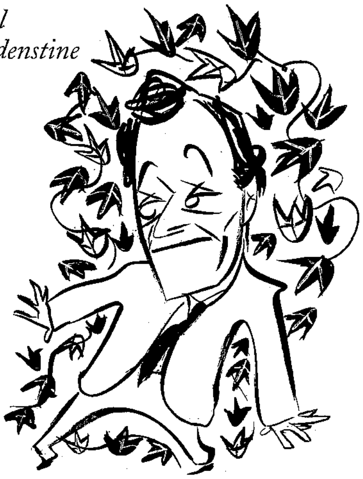
FIGHT FIERCELY, HARVARD!

A Law School professor jousts with President Neil Rudenstine.

CHARLES NESSON is the kind of Harvard Law School professor who could play himself on television. He has a slow and beautifully modulated voice, a fine mane of silver hair, and the pink cheeks of middle age. Nesson is able to use the phrase "Harvard man" unselfconsciously, as in, "I am a Harvard man to my soul." It is, in fact, precisely *because* he is a Harvard man that he has chosen for the evidence class he is currently teaching a case that is likely to mortify the university and its president, Neil Rudenstine, who has had his share of troubles in recent years. Nesson's class is studying Rudenstine's controversial decision to deny tenure to Peter Berkowitz, an associate professor in the government department. The class is working with a private investigator to ferret out documents whose confidentiality is a matter of ancient Harvard tradition. Nesson will post on the Internet whatever documents the investigator turns up. It is, Nesson says, "a justice story." Were the professor not so very devout a Harvard man, one might be tempted to think that it was also a mischief story.

Berkowitz is a political theorist who has compiled an impressive array of publications and awards. But when he learned last year that Rudenstine had rejected his candidacy, he was devastated. Then he began to hear allegations that the ad-hoc committee, a body convened to make recommendations to the president about tenure candidates, had been stacked with scholars hostile to his work, which is generally considered conservative. Harvard's tenure-review process is infamously tortuous, and Nesson says that when he heard Berkowitz's story he was "convinced that this was another example of the miscarriage of this star-chamber process." He agreed to serve as Berkowitz's lawyer. When an attempt to get the university to launch an investigation was summarily dismissed, Nesson had the devilish inspiration to "pursue them through Harvard," as he puts it. His students would take on his client as their cause, and their own alma-mater-to-be as their adversary.

Last week, Nesson, in a faded black turtleneck and khakis, was padding through the mock courtroom in which he teaches.


Neil Rudenstine

"This university has been built on secrecy," he told the students; they scribbled in their notebooks and tapped on their laptops. "The idea of confidentiality runs through the university and is ingrained in us." Did the principle of academic privilege, he asked, permit the university "to conduct processes that deeply affect people's lives under a total cloak of secrecy"? It was unclear. Who wanted to look into the case law and the *Law Review* commentary?

Berkowitz himself, looking very pale and, at thirty-eight, very young, sat on a chair between the dock and the lawyers' table, a live, and very uncomfortable, item of evidence. "The other side"—Harvard, that is—"will just give you the frosting," Nesson thundered. "When you dig down and get the letters"—letters written by senior government-department professors to the ad-hoc committee—"we're into the cake beneath the frosting." The university, he said, would resist them with every tool at its disposal.

At lunch after class, Nesson held forth with the fearlessness of a tenured professor. Berkowitz, reduced to the role of bit player in his own drama, sat quietly, occasionally clearing his throat as if to speak up and then thinking better of it. Berkowitz is hoping that the private investigator will find proof that the ad-hoc committee was rigged. Nesson has said in class that this may have been the handiwork of a colleague whose book Berkowitz criticized in print.

A university spokesman says, "Institutions like Harvard do not touch a professor in his classroom." Of course, President Rudenstine, who has struggled to escape from the shadow of his predecessor, Derek Bok, and who took a leave three years ago to recover from exhaustion, may have trouble appreciating Nesson's patriotic motives. Nesson saw Rudenstine at a party a few days before the evidence class began. "I told Neil that we were going to do this," he recalls, "and Neil nodded his head and said, 'That will be very interesting.' "

—JAMES TRAUB

ART AND COMMERCE

Rupert Murdoch reinvents the fine art of finger painting.

RUPERT MURDOCH has his finger in a lot of pies. He was recently made a papal knight and has been identified as one of the models for the villain in the new James Bond movie. So the lobby of a new building on Murdoch's Twentieth Century Fox lot in Los Angeles features a mural of his fingerprint—specifically, the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

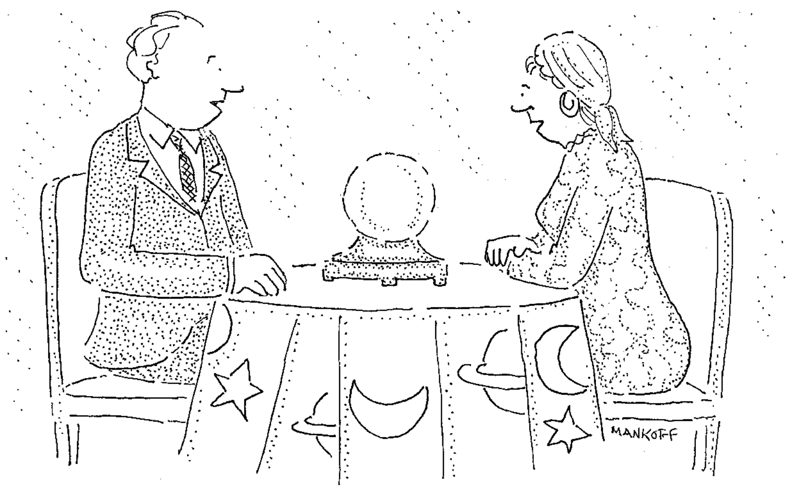
index finger of his right hand—thirty-six feet high.

Tony Berlant, the California artist who made the piece, says, "It's a version of the portrait of the leader that you might see in the lobby of an old office building. You might say he's pointing the way." Before the artist discussed the project, called "Fox," with Anna Murdoch, the boss's wife and the mural's principal patron, he made her a maquette using a print of his own right ring finger. "She understood the idea quickly," Berlant said. "I was given a lot of freedom."

Each of the mural's ten panels is made of dozens of pieces of tin cut into abstract shapes, nailed to a wooden backing, and painted in shades of blue, yellow, and green, colors chosen for their resonance with the landscape of Southern California. For Berlant, whose work is shown at the L.A. Louver gallery, the palette also suggests the Chumash Indians who once lived in the area. The result is like a very tall Expressionist painting in which the more than hundred and forty thousand tiny nail heads serve as brushstrokes might in a traditional painting.

"Doing a huge fingerprint has its roots in Surrealism," Berlant told me over lunch at the studio commissary, under a 1935 mural of Fox stars. (I spotted Will Rogers and Shirley Temple.) "People will see it in different ways. For me it suggests radio pulses that emanate from electrical towers in old drawings."

The police-style fingerprints that Berlant worked from were taken in Mr. Murdoch's office by a member of the company's security force. Why did Berlant choose the Rupert index finger over, say, the Rupert thumb? "It was the pattern that attracted me," said Berlant, a thoughtful man of fifty-six. "It didn't matter which finger, although I was pleased to see that it was the pointing finger I chose." —DAVID FREEMAN



"What's the final episode of 'Seinfeld' about?"

"It's about nothing."

HOOPLA DEPT.

A First Amendment wizard pays tribute to his sacred text.

TALK about a fancy excuse for a party. A few years ago, the lawyer Floyd Abrams's wife, Efrat, gave him an especially thoughtful birthday present—an original copy of the French newspaper containing Émile Zola's manifesto, "J'accuse," which Abrams considers the greatest piece of journalism ever written. Abrams was noodling around his office at Cahill Gordon & Reindel the other day when he glanced at the yellowed document, which is framed on his wall, and noticed the publication date: January 13, 1898. The hundredth anniversary was fast approaching and, the next thing you know, it was put on your dancing shoes.

No dancing, actually. But for the Century Association it was an uncharacteristically ambulatory crowd that gathered last Monday night, at Abrams's invitation, to toast the "J'accuse" centennial. Abrams has represented media clients for so long and so successfully that he operates as a sort of unofficial executive director of the First Amendment, and there were quite a few working journalists mixed in with the big-shot lawyers and judges who are Abrams's day-to-day confrères—which was, Abrams promised in his opening remarks, the only French word he would utter that evening. The journalists in attendance represented a frequent-fliers club of First Amendment usage—among them Morley Safer, Gabe Pressman, Dominick Dunne, and Sidney Zion, who spent much of the evening trapped in the Devil's Island-like smoking area of the Century's basement.

Journalists being rather cranky sorts, there was an embarrassing question going around with the canapés. Yes, everyone greatly admired "J'accuse," but how many party guests had actually read the thing? Steven Brill, the self-styled journalistic hall monitor (his new media magazine, *Content*, débuts in June) and a notorious smarty-pants, insisted that he'd read it at Yale. Among most of the other guests, however, modesty prevailed. Had they read it? Nope—not personally. But some did recall the Paul Muni movie.

STANDING in front of a billiards table, Abrams filled in the background. A successful novelist and journalist, Zola was outraged at the anti-Semitism evinced by the false conviction of Alfred Dreyfus on spying charges. The newspaper *L'Aurore* published "J'accuse," his letter of protest to President Félix Faure of France. Though Zola was promptly convicted of libel and forced to flee to England to avoid prison, the story of "J'accuse," Abrams told the crowd, was one of how "good speech triumphed over bad speech."

The evening concluded with three of Abrams's friends—the writers Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg and Roger Rosenblatt and the federal-appeals-court judge Pierre Leval—reading excerpts from "J'accuse." The details of the Dreyfus Affair may have been lost on many, but there was no mistaking the power of Zola's words. Schlossberg read quietly, "History will record that it was during your Presidency that such a crime against society was committed." Rosenblatt went for earnestness: "The unfortunate man is tearing out his hair." But Leval got the best lines, and he boomed out the unforgettable cadences of the conclusion. "I accuse Lt. Col. du Paty de Clam of having been the diabolical agent of a miscarriage of justice. . . . I accuse General Mercier. . . . I accuse the War Office. . . ." And with that, the assembled guests gave an appreciative—and enlightened—"Hear! Hear!" —JEFFREY TOOBIN

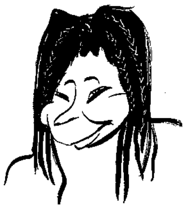
GIRL TALK

A theatrical anatomy lesson to celebrate St. Valentine's Day.

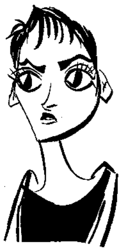
MARISA TOMEI, in the usual course of events, would be spending Valentine's Day alone with her boyfriend. Next month, however, Tomei will be celebrating the lovers' holiday not whispering by candlelight, but standing onstage at the Hammerstein Ballroom Theatre, delivering a monologue about vaginal depilation. "It will be a challenge," Tomei said the other day, in perfectly modulated nineties-speak.

Tomei, along with more than a dozen other well-known women, including Winona Ryder, Glenn Close, Rosie Perez, Liz Smith, Gloria Steinem, and Lily Tomlin, is participating in a benefit performance of "The Vagina Monologues," by the playwright Eve Ensler. A spirited woman who favors bright-red lipstick, Ensler is a kind of Anna Deavere Smith of the nether regions. She compiled this collection of sometimes amusing, often poignant pieces after conducting scores of interviews with women across America and abroad about their feelings vis-à-vis their sex organs. (The work ran Off Broadway two years ago.) "*Everything* used to make me blush," says Ensler, whose show introduces audiences to some unfamiliar euphemisms, such as "coochi snorcher," "but after you have said 'vagina' the thousandth time you feel good."

The February 14th event, which Ensler has dubbed V-Day, will raise money to combat violence against women. "It is time for women to come together in a spirit of passionate change," Ensler says. It is also time for Whoopi Goldberg to get up onstage and deliver a monologue entitled, "My Angry Vagina," written especially for her by Ensler; for Susan Sarandon—who will be dressed, like all the participants, in red velvet—to perform a monologue about witnessing a birth; for Shirley Knight to impersonate an elderly Jewish woman talking about "down there." ("I haven't been down there since 1953. No, it had nothing to do with Eisenhower.")



Whoopi Goldberg



Winona Ryder

Ensler likes to think of her play as consciousness-raising for the nineties. In the first days of what was then called women's lib, when the idea that the personal was political seemed fresh, consciousness-raising was something done by anonymous women huddled in dark apartments, talking as frankly as they could about their bodies and their appetites. Now that politics have become absurdly personal (Paula Jones, Dick Morris), and frank talk about bodies and appetites is the stuff of mainstream entertainment, it seems appropriate that consciousness-raising should be something that is done by prominent women on a spotlit stage, before a paying audience.

"I was taught that my vagina was something private to the point of embarrassment," the comedienne Kathy Najimy said, explaining her involvement in V-Day. "And then I started in the women's movement, and I realized that if you have sex you have power." She added, "Now, I would like my middle name to be Vagina."

—REBECCA MEAD

LIFE WELL LIVED DEPT.

Philip Johnson and other friends take their leave of a singular patroness.

WHEN Ben Garber, a piano tuner, was summoned to the Houston home of Dominique de Menil last Friday, no one told him that the lady of the house, the mighty arts patron and museum builder, was lying in bed down the hall, dead. Garber was led directly into the living room of the house, which Philip Johnson designed for the de Menils in 1949, and started working on the piano, a 1918 Steinway. As he worked, observing the clusters of people passing through, Garber figured out what was going on. "I could hear them talking about what a full life she'd led," he says, "and how that wasn't really her in there, only her body." And he discovered why he was there: Mrs. de Menil's granddaughter, Victoria, was flying in from Indonesia and wanted to rehearse the Fauré she would sing at the funeral.

"Would you like to see Mrs. de Menil?" Garber heard someone say as guests arrived. Philip Johnson, down from Connecticut, was uncomfortable with the idea. "I usually don't like those sorts of things," he said afterward, "but I owe my career to her." When John de Menil died, in 1973, he was also put on view at the family home, but propped up in bed. "I wonder what that was about?" Johnson, who can't shake the memory, mused. Mrs. de Menil was lying on her bed, under a pale cashmere blanket, hands folded across her chest. "She was under a moon," Johnson said, meaning the Max Ernst painting hanging above the headboard. A single ivory-colored candle was burning on a low bookcase. "Very Dominique."

Johnson generally dislikes visiting the houses he's designed, but says that he always found trips to this one a pleasure. "Dominique knew how to live in a house," he said. "She knew what to put with those amazing Charles James sofas." The designer Charles James, who died a bitter man in 1978—holed up in the Chelsea Hotel, his ideas and livelihood, he maintained, stolen by his protégé Halston—decorated the de Menil house when Johnson built it. "And she didn't change a thing for fifty years," the architect continued, except to hang more paintings. "It's like Balenciaga in there. She knew she had something that was perfect."

As other mourners gathered in the living room, preparing themselves for the sight of a corpse, the piano tuner went about his work. Kneeling at the Steinway, he plunked the same key over and over, as piano tuners do. More than one friend, on hearing the tones, assumed that the music—John Cage? or was it Morton Feldman?—was a part of the proceedings. "It made sense," said Stephen Fox, an architectural historian, "given the kind of music Mrs. de Menil presented at her museum concerts." After tuning the instrument, Garber tested it by playing Schubert's Sonata in D Major and a little Chopin. And then he left.

—VANCE MUSE

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ANNALS OF DIPLOMACY

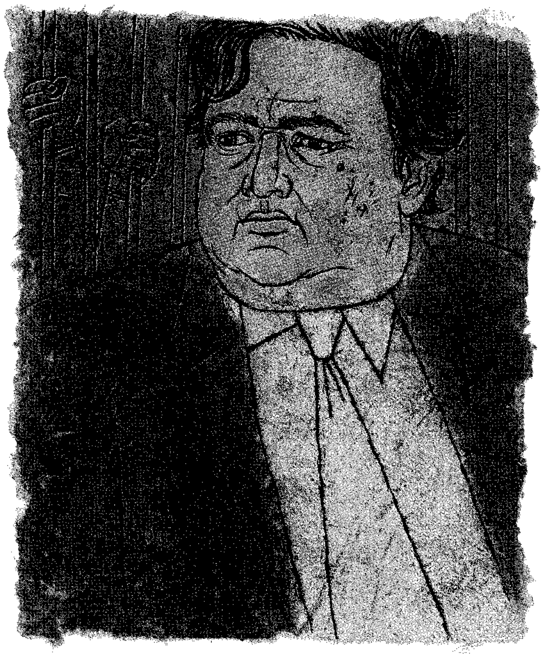
BACKFIRE

Two years ago, the Clinton Administration wanted to make a historic change with Cuba. But something went terribly wrong.

BY CARL NAGIN

ONE of the more unusual partnerships in recent American diplomacy has been that between Bill Richardson and Peter Bourne. Richardson, a former congressman from New Mexico who is now the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, was once called the Red Adair of American diplomacy in honor of his sometimes unconventional missions. Bourne, a psychiatrist by training, was President Carter's special envoy on world health and hunger issues, and he continued those efforts in the late seventies and early eighties at the United Nations, as an assistant secretary-general. He has had a passion for issues involving Cuba; in 1986, he wrote a psychobiography of Fidel Castro.

Bourne has been described as a person who exaggerates his own role in events. "He is a self-appointed emissary to nations categorized as rogue," says a Washington intelligence expert who knows Bourne. "He has a sort of European social-democrat approach in terms of political tolerance. He almost defies description." Yet Richardson has found Bourne "great at moving the bureaucracy in Washington," and came to rely on him for assistance. In 1995, Bourne helped get access to Saddam Hussein, and in July of that year he and Richardson travelled to Baghdad together to secure the release of two American aerospace workers who had been captured by the Iraqis after wandering over the Kuwaiti border. Richardson and Bourne subsequently collaborated on a number of such efforts in Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, and North Korea, where Richardson helped win the release of an American lay preacher who had crossed to the wrong side of the border. "Many of these foreign leaders know that I'm close to the Administration, that I can talk to them, but I'm not a member of the Administration," Richardson said in a radio interview in early 1996.



Bill Richardson met twice with Castro in Havana but denies that the two made any deal.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

In late 1995, at a time when America's Cuba policy was foundering, Richardson and Bourne both turned their attention toward Havana, in the hope of improving relations with Cuba. Richardson says that the Cubans had been asking him to visit Havana for some time, and in January of 1996 he made the first of two trips to Cuba. There he met with Fidel Castro and other government officials. But this new initiative was halted a month later, when two planes piloted by Cuban exiles who called themselves Brothers to the Rescue were shot down over the Straits of Florida by the Cuban Air Force. Outrage over the deaths of four men greatly increased antagonism toward the Castro regime and forced the Clinton Administration to reverse its Cuba policy.

Bourne and Richardson have now ended their informal partnership, and perhaps their friendship; they offer very different explanations of what happened in the months leading up to the downing of the planes. Bourne, who was not in Cuba at the time of the meetings, says that an agreement was reached between Richardson and Castro: in exchange for the release of political prisoners, he says, Richardson conveyed assurances to Castro that the United States would take steps to end incursions of Cuban airspace by Brothers to the Rescue. Richardson says that nothing of the sort was ever discussed, although he acknowledges that the Cubans raised the matter of the overflights. He describes his visits in limited terms—as an effort to resolve humanitarian questions, and in particular to win the release of the political prisoners.

The Brothers had been an embarrassment to the Castro regime for years. Since 1991, the group had helped save thousands of Cuban refugees by dropping orange flares and guiding Coast Guard ships to their locations by radio. The Brothers' leader, a Bay of Pigs veteran named José Basulto, was a pilot with singular credentials: In August of 1962, he took part in an attempt to assassinate Castro. Thirty years later, the Brothers' missions, which were seemingly beyond anyone's control, had made Basulto a Miami media star.

Today, Bourne and Richardson even disagree about whether the executive branch approved of the Cuba mission. Bourne says that they had direct approval from President Clinton, from his then national-security adviser, Anthony Lake, and from other intelligence officials. Richardson, in the 1996 radio interview, acknowledged that in the past the President, the Secretary of State, and others had been coöperative. "I'm following their advice, although they have deniability and I'm sure if I screw up they won't know who I am," he said. But Richardson insists that the executive branch was not involved in his efforts in Cuba.

CUBA has bedevilled every American President since Dwight D. Eisenhower. It began shaping up as a political battle for President Clinton in 1995, when Under-Secretary of State Peter Tarnoff initiated secret talks with the Cuban government—talks that led to a migration accord intended to halt the exodus of thousands of Cuban rafters across the Straits of Florida. During that period, Congress was trying to toughen the longstanding trade embargo. The focus of the pro-embargo forces was a bill introduced in February of 1995 by Representative Dan Burton, an Indiana Republican, and Senator Jesse Helms, of North Carolina, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Under the Helms-Burton legislation, foreign companies investing in Cuba would face American lawsuits, and the State Department could deny visas to the heads of many of those companies and their major shareholders. The House passed its version of the Helms-Burton bill in September, by a vote of 294–130.

Clinton and his advisers found powerful allies to oppose the bill, including the businessmen Dwayne Andreas and Donald Trump. Trump said, "The people of Cuba are the greatest in the world.... As soon as the law changes, I am ready to build the Taj Mahal in Havana." Andreas, the chairman of Archer-Daniels-Midland, claimed not to "know a corporate C.E.O. who thinks excluding U.S. business is a good idea, particularly when all of Western Europe is down there." On October 6th, a group of forty-five prominent executives, headed by the Time Warner chairman, Gerald Levin, met with Leon Panetta, then the White House chief of staff, and several Clinton foreign-policy advisers, and received approval for a trip to Havana.

Clinton had been listening for some time to similar appeals from various National Security Council and State Department officials, including Lake, Tarnoff, the senior N.S.C. adviser Morton Halperin, and Richard Nuccio, Clinton's special adviser on Cuba policy, and they had persuaded the President to launch new initiatives: a loosening of travel restrictions; the issue of licenses for American news bureaus in Havana; and the provision of grants for nongovernmental organizations, such as Freedom House, an anti-Castro human-rights group based in Washington, to promote "democracy and the free flow of ideas" in Cuba. On the day that the executives met with Panetta, Clinton announced these new Cuba measures at a breakfast for Freedom House held at a Washington hotel.

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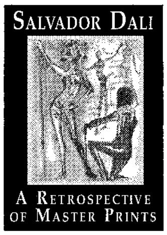

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MARTHA'S VINEYARD
VACATION RENTALS

swift and negative. Bob Dole, the Senate Majority Leader and a Presidential candidate, called for the immediate passage of Helms-Burton and asked the State Department to deny Castro a visa for a visit to New York scheduled for later that month in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. At a press conference, Dole said, "All signs point to normalization, and secret negotiations with Castro."

Clinton's advisers defended the initiatives as "calibrated responses" to "promote peaceful change" in Cuba. They warned that passing Helms-Burton could produce new waves of Cuban refugees. But prominent anti-Castro exiles, like Jorge Mas Canosa, of the Cuban American National Foundation, intensified their lobbying; the bill was alive in the Senate.

SUCH were the fractious domestic politics of Cuba policy when Castro addressed the U.N. General Assembly on October 22, 1995, and denounced the trade embargo. Before that, according to Peter Bourne and Janet Shenk, the executive director of a foundation that sponsors liberal causes, Bourne had helped Congressman Richardson arrange a private audience with Castro; Bourne says he told Richardson that the meeting would be unofficial.

Richardson, who says that he met briefly with the president of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, at the U.N. in September of 1995, denies that he met privately with Castro. He says that he greeted the Cuban leader at a U.N. reception in the company of other congressmen. But others at the reception, who spoke with Richardson, said that the two did meet privately. On October 27th, the Miami *Herald* reported, "Two influential Democrats, Reps Bill Richardson of New Mexico and Joe Moakley of Massachusetts, met separately with Castro on Tuesday night"—October 24th.

There is no disagreement about what happened next: Richardson arranged to visit Havana in January, and, when conservative Cuban exiles in Miami learned of the impending trip, they were angered. On Miami radio, Mas Canosa said it would be "shameful" if Clinton were "negotiating behind the backs of Americans and Cuban exiles." The Washington *Times* reported that Castro had been told that if he released prisoners Clinton could then justify a veto of Helms-Burton. A White House spokesman, Michael McCurry, denied it: "There's been absolutely no contact of the nature suggested in that report."

The White House was well aware of the political dangers of secret negotiations with the Castro regime. The previous spring, demonstrators protesting the migration accord had blocked Dade County streets and highways. The migration accord had also nullified the mission of Brothers to the Rescue. With the refugee crisis over, José Basulto, who is fifty-seven, turned to aerial civil disobedience, crossing the twenty-fourth parallel and illegally flying over Cuban waters.

For more than a year, Cuban officials protested these incursions in communiqués to the State Department and to the United States-interest section in Havana. The protests were largely ignored. On July 17, 1995, Basulto went further: He took a cameraman from an NBC-affiliate station in Miami on a rooftop-level flight over downtown Havana and rained propaganda and religious medals on the streets below. The incident was broadcast on the local evening news. In September, the Federal Aviation Administration notified Basulto that it had probable cause to ground him. But Basulto fought to keep his license and resumed his missions, threatening to make them weekly events.

Basulto and his pilots made two more overflights on January 9 and 13, 1996. "We dropped half a million leaflets that fell over Havana," Basulto told me last week. That happened just before Richardson told a reporter for the Palm Beach *Post*, "If we're going to open up the island maybe some consideration should be given to lifting the embargo. Let clothes, goods, commerce and business get in there."

RICHARDSON arrived in Havana on January 17th. He was accompanied by Calvin Humphrey, a senior counsel to the House Intelligence Committee. Humphrey had received briefings from State Department officials, the National Security Council, and intelligence agencies. Nuccio, the President's Cuba-policy adviser, told me that he had spoken to Richardson before the trip. When I asked Richardson about those preparations, he said that in the past "a lot of my missions were with the N.S.C. They did involve the President." But this time, he

"We could reshape your nose with conventional surgery, but I'm going to suggest something radical."

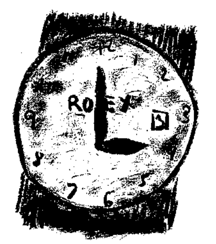
said, he worked with Tarnoff, at the State Department.

Richardson and Humphrey's stay began with a lengthy session with Castro, which lasted until 2 o'clock the next morning. Richardson spoke in Spanish; Humphrey followed through an interpreter. With Castro were top politicians, including Alarcón and the economics chief, Carlos Lage. They discussed joint drug interdictions, human rights, the extradition of American fugitives, and the upcoming Presidential primaries in the United States. The discussions, Richardson said, also focussed on such humanitarian issues as reducing Cuban emigration fees. Richardson had brought with him a list of ten Cuban political prisoners and sought their release.

According to Humphrey, Castro later brought up the overflights by Brothers to the Rescue. "There was a belief on the part of the Cubans that if the United States government wanted to stop the flights, it was a fait accompli," Calvin Humphrey told me. He also said, "What they didn't know was that they had a misunderstanding of how the American political scene worked. There was no commitment to do anything." What Humphrey didn't know was that, a few days after the January 13th overflight, Castro had issued orders to his Air Force to shoot down any plane that entered Cuban airspace illegally.

On the third, and last, evening of the stay, Richardson attended a baseball game. Richardson, like Castro, is an accomplished ballplayer. "We talked an hour about baseball," Richardson recalls. He teased Castro: "I said you have no pitching here. You have great hitters." As for the overflights, Richardson said two weeks after the planes were shot down, "When I met with him"—Castro—"he had warned me about these overflights and he wanted us to do something about them."

Richardson's was not the only unofficial channel to Cuba, and he was not the only one who had heard complaints about the incursions. Concerns about the overflights had also been expressed to Scott Armstrong, who is a founder of the National Security Archive, a former journalist, and the co-author, with Bob Woodward, of "The Brethren." Armstrong had close ties to several senior National Security Council officials, including Lake, Halperin, and Sandy Berger; in 1994, he says, he had served as a conduit for both the N.S.C. and various Cuban officials in setting up the early phases of the migration accords. He recently recalled that on the morning of January 18th he heard from the N.S.C. "I got a call from someone at the Old Executive Office Building and was told that the Brothers' problem had been resolved and that I should communicate this to the appropriate Cuban officials," Armstrong said. "I then conveyed the message to Alarcón through Fernando Remírez"—Cuba's highest diplomatic officer in the United States.



Coincidentally, the overflights stopped for a few weeks. The office of Transportation Secretary Federico Peña told me that Peña had asked the F.A.A. to make sure that the Brothers were warned against further violations. Basulto does not remember receiving any warning, and said that he had decided to stop the flights in January, because there were no more refugees, but had planned to resume them. In early February, Robert White, the former United States Ambassador to El Salvador, travelled to Havana with a delegation of retired Pentagon officials and diplomats for discussions with top Cuban military officers. The delegation had planned a roundtable on relations in the post-Cold War era, but, to its surprise, the main topic of conversations was the Brothers, even though there was a hiatus in the overflights. Air Force General Arnaldo Tomayo, the Cuban cosmonaut, startled White by asking, "What would be the reaction of your military if we shot down one of those planes?"

"It was a calculated warning, from the head of the Cuban armed forces," White says. "We were meant to take away the very clear impression that the Cubans had reached the limit of their tolerance of the Brothers' flights."

White's group left Havana on February 9th, and White was debriefed at the State Department and with Defense Intelligence Agency officials. He and an official who had been with him in Cuba told Defense Intelligence, "You've either got to stop this"—the overflights, which Basulto was planning to resume—"or an incident is going to occur."

On the day that White left Havana, Richardson returned for his second visit. The next day, Richardson came back to the United States, accompanied by three prisoners released by Castro. Richardson told CNN that Castro had asked nothing in exchange for their release.

Last week, I asked Richardson again whether Castro had agreed to release prisoners in exchange for an agreement to stop the overflights. "This is total fiction, fantasy," he said. "I think the Cubans are looking for a way to justify their stupid and tragic decision to shoot down the plane. Castro never said, 'You get them to stop.' "

Calvin Humphrey says, "Certainly the White House was aware of the trip. Was Mr. Richardson carrying some sort of special message? I was totally unaware of this, so I doubt it seriously."

Bourne is just as certain of what the Cubans believe took place. "Fidel basically told Bill he'd release prisoners if he went back to Clinton and got some assurance about ending the Brothers' overflights," Bourne told me. "When Bill returned to Cuba, Castro understood that he had the President's word."

By early 1996, Richard Nuccio had grown worried about what he felt was the desperation of Cuban complaints about the overflights. On February 20th, he completed a memo for the President outlining possible compromises on Helms-Burton. Three days later, law-enforcement reports of an impending Brothers overflight reached him at the N.S.C. That afternoon, Nuccio asked the State Department to get the Federal Aviation Administration to issue a warning to the Brothers. (It was later reported that American radar centers and various intelligence agencies had had knowledge of a Brothers mission a week beforehand.)

That same afternoon, the State Department warned the F.A.A.'s Office of International Aviation of a possible Brothers flight. At 2:40 P.M., an F.A.A. official E-mailed the information to a regional office in Miami. The message read, "I've reiterated that the F.A.A. cannot PREVENT flights such as this potential one, but that we'll alert our folks in case it happens and we'll document it (as best we can) for compliance/enforcement purposes." At 6 P.M., an F.A.A. military-liaison officer in Miami alerted radar and tracking centers at key defense listening posts around the country to the planned overflight. But there is no record of anyone's attempting to make contact with Cuban officials. At 6:44 P.M., Nuccio told me, he sent an urgent E-mail to his N.S.C. superior, Sandy Berger, warning that "this may finally tip the Cubans toward an attempt to shoot down or force down the plane." Nuccio believed that the F.A.A. "had basically told the State Department to fuck off—that it wasn't their business to ground those planes."

On the morning of February 24th, two weeks after Richardson's second visit to Havana, Carlos Costa, a twenty-nine-year-old Cuban-American pilot, filed flight plans for a search-and-rescue mission over the Straits of Florida. The Brothers believed that a recent political crackdown by Castro on human-rights activists could result in a new wave of Cubans taking to sea.

Costa had logged some four hundred hours of flight time on volunteer missions, and regarded them as routine. He stuffed his duffelbag with a swimsuit, suntan lotion, and a towel for a beach outing planned for that afternoon. Also flying with him was Pablo Morales, age twenty-eight, who had been rescued by the Brothers four years earlier. In a second plane were Mario de la Peña and Armando Alejandre. The lead pilot on the mission was the president of the Brothers, José Basulto.

Nearly two hours later, the three planes, all Cessnas, were about to cross the twenty-fourth parallel. Between there and Cuba's twelve-mile territorial limit were about thirty miles of airspace, which the Cuban government defines as an air-defense identification zone. Basulto radioed to the Havana Air Control Center at 2:57 P.M. "Good afternoon, Havana Center," he said, in Spanish. "We should be crossing parallel twenty-four in about five minutes and staying in your area."

The Havana Air Control Center, whose radar had already picked up the planes, replied, "Roger, sir. We inform you that the area north of Havana is activated. You are taking a risk by flying south of twenty-four."

"We know that we are in danger each time that we fly into the area south of twenty-four, but we are ready to do so as free Cubans," Basulto proclaimed.

Minutes before Basulto's radio message, two Cuban MIG fighter planes had taken off from an airfield near Havana.

Three thousand miles away, at March Air Force Base, in Riverside, California, a United States Customs Service detection specialist named Jeff Houlihan studied his radar monitor. He had tracked the Brothers' planes before, and the F.A.A. had alerted him to look out for them. The three planes flashed like orange Pac-Man squares on his screen. Houlihan watched them move south, shadowed by two chalky "X"es—the MIGs. Basulto's plane was now at least one and a half miles into Cuban airspace, but the two others, Houlihan recorded, were well outside. Houlihan called Tyndall Air Force Base, in Florida.

"Yeah, we know all about it," a senior Air Force technician monitoring the same radar signals replied. "We're taking care of it."

Six minutes after his call, at 3:24 P.M., Houlihan watched his screen in astonishment as one orange square disappeared and then, a few minutes later, another. Electronic snapshots of his radar screen documented what he later described as "cold-blooded murder."

"We hit him!" American electronic listening posts heard one of the MIG pilots shout, after an R-73 missile blew the first Cessna out of the sky. "*Cojones!* We hit him! . . . This one won't mess around anymore."

"The other is destroyed!" a pilot in the other MIG shouted after demolishing the second Brothers plane. "Fatherland or death! . . . The other is down also."

Only Basulto's Cessna escaped, dodging the MIGs in scattered clouds.

Two days later, President Clinton condemned the Cuban action as "an appalling reminder of the Cuban regime—repressive, violent, scornful of international law." He ended all commercial air links to Cuba, limited domestic travel of Cuban diplomats within the United States, and authorized compensation for the victims' families from Cuban assets that had been frozen in American banks since Castro's revolution.

But an even more dramatic step was a change of course on the bill he and his advisers had opposed for a year: Clinton announced that he intended to sign Helms-Burton. Sensing victory, its key congressional supporters moved to introduce a more stringent version of the bill. The coup de grâce was a new measure codifying the embargo. It prevented Clinton and any future President from lifting the embargo without prior congressional approval. Clinton's Cuba policy was in ruins.

At a meeting chaired by Lake a few days after the incident, some of the President's top advisers gathered in the Situation Room to discuss the latest news from the Hill. As Nuccio recalls the meeting, "[George] Stephanopoulos"—the former Clinton adviser—"said, 'The President has to sign the bill.' Panetta and Lake both agreed. And I realized this was not a meeting to review the President's options. The President's decision had already been made for him."

UNDENIABLY, the Cuban military had other options; it did not have to destroy unarmed civilian planes. It is unclear why the Cubans would take such drastic measures if they were eager to repair ties to the United States. It is equally unclear why the United States, aware of the overflights and of their immense risk, apparently took no steps to warn either the pilots or the Cubans and to urge restraint.

Peter Bourne has tried to make sense of what went wrong, and he wonders whether his friend Bill Richardson fully understood what was at stake in his negotiations with Castro. The Cubans, too, may have believed that they had reached an understanding with Richardson, though that is not the recollection of Richardson or Calvin Humphrey.

At the time of the downing of the planes, Richardson was on his way to Bangladesh with Humphrey, and when he returned, a week later, Bourne confronted him. Bourne told me, "I said to him, 'What the hell happened, because my credibility with the Cubans that you used to get there is on the line. And I'm the one who is going to have to explain to them what happened. And if they feel you double-crossed them it's my twenty-year relationship that's going to get burned, not yours.' And he said, 'I promise you that I talked to Clinton and Clinton said, "I will call [Secretary] Peña and we'll get it taken care of." ' "

Richardson denies that such an exchange ever took place. When asked if Bourne was lying, he replied, "If he said that, he's lying."

On March 5, 1996, the Senate approved the final version of Helms-Burton, by a vote of 74–22. A week later, at an emotional White House ceremony including relatives of the pilots, the President signed the bill "in the name of the four men who were killed." He also declared a national emergency in the Straits of Florida to prevent further confrontations.

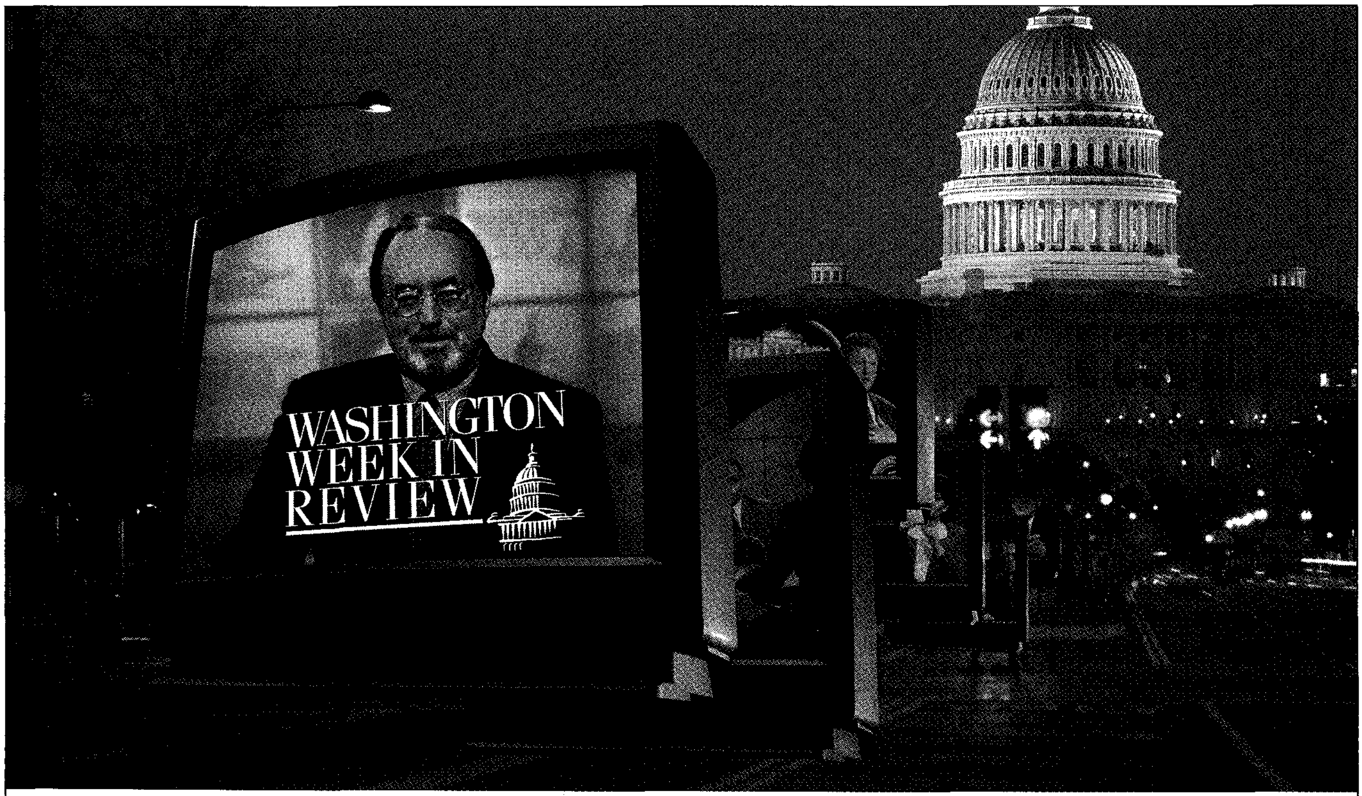
Bourne was part of one of the first groups of Americans to visit Havana after the planes were shot down, and he met with Alarcón and other Cuban officials. In an April 9th memo to Richardson, he wrote, "They say Fidel told you: 'I am not releasing these prisoners for you. I am releasing them for President Clinton.' They also said they had the same assurance from Clinton through another channel but would not say who that was. Fidel then told others that he had a clear commitment from one head of state to another that the flights would be stopped."

Alarcón and other Cuban officials subsequently told me that Bourne's memo portrayed their views accurately; Richardson and Humphrey point out that Bourne was not present at the meetings. In an interview with CBS News on April 30th, Castro said that one of his emissaries had received promises from the "highest levels" of the United States government that there would be no more incursions into Cuban airspace.

Bourne's relations with Richardson soured as Richardson lost interest in Bourne's continuing efforts to maintain a Cuba gambit. Richardson certainly had a clear understanding of the reality of domestic politics. The downing of the planes, he said in March of 1996, is "going to cool any kind of normalization talks at least for a year till after the election."

Richardson has remained a favorite of the President, who called his operations "the toughest and most delicate diplomatic missions of recent times." On December 13, 1996, after announcing Richardson's nomination as U.N. Ambassador, Clinton said, "Just this week, Congressman Richardson was huddled in a rebel chieftain's hut in Sudan, eating barbecued goat." For months after his confirmation, Richardson answered none of Bourne's communiqués.

Bourne wrote a three-hundred-page report for the American Association for World Health on the trade embargo's effect on the Cuban population's health. It was cited by the sponsors of legislation, currently before Congress, exempting food and medicine from the embargo. The national emergency in the Straits of Florida continues, but American officials now regularly alert Cuban officials to impending or suspected air and sea incursions by exile groups. A senior White House official told me last week, "We now have it down to a fine art." ♦



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REFLECTIONS

THE POET AND THE REVOLUTIONARY

After years of not knowing what to do with each other, the Pope and Fidel Castro have decided to join hands.

BY LORENZO ALBACETE

THE first time I went to Cuba, in February of 1989, I felt that I was on a secret mission. My "cover" (which, undramatically, was also one of my real-life jobs) was that of theological adviser to the Northeast Hispanic Catholic Center: I was helping to chaperon a pilgrimage. Among the center's other activities, it arranges for groups of Latino parishioners to travel to their countries of origin, and that year we had finally won approval from the Cuban government to send a group of visitors. The center's director and I were warned, however, that any religious objects we might bring would have to be for personal use only. The Cuban authorities frowned upon the importing of Bibles, rosaries, or pious books with intent to distribute.

My "secret" was related to this prohibition: we were bringing with us parts of an apparatus that makes the Communion wafers used in the Catholic Mass. Apparently, most of this machine had already been carried into Cuba, and our group was bringing in the last parts, which would finally allow the contraption to work. We were to deliver the parts to a particular group of cloistered nuns, who supported their order by supplying wafers to Catholic parishes.

Our flight to Havana and passage through Cuban customs was without incident, and for the first few days we visited only churches and holy sites. Finally, one night we quietly left our quarters and delivered our cargo to the convent. After the deed was done, the Mother Superior served us cookies; the convent had a constant supply, she said—"a gift from Fidel." For the past twenty-eight years, she explained, the Communist government had been paying modest but steady reparations to the convent for an unfortunate episode related to the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Immediately following the invasion, in 1961, militiamen stormed into the convent looking for counter-revolutionaries. The nuns were lined up in the courtyard while soldiers "went unaccompanied into our rooms," the Mother Superior said, sounding still somewhat shocked by the memory. After several hours, the nuns were allowed to telephone the Vatican Ambassador, and he immediately protested to the government. The soldiers were ordered out of the convent. A few hours later, cookies arrived, and they have been arriving ever since, along with an occasional box of candy and, every year, a fat bird for Christmas dinner.

Most of the sisters were elderly, but we were introduced to half a dozen novices, who had been born under the Revolution. All of them had come from nonbelieving families and were college-educated. Each told us basically the same story: she had met Catholic students at the university, had been struck by their sense of social mission, and had ended up deciding to devote her life to social service through contemplation in the cloister. "It became clear to me that the strength of revolutionary ideology was weakening—that it could no longer demand the kind of sacrifices it once did," one of the novices, a former sociology student, said. "I became fascinated by the notion of an absolute that inspired people to help others." Indeed, every time I spoke with young Cuban Catholics, even the seminary students in Havana, they used this sort of revolutionary language to describe their faith.

For me, these encounters crystallized the peculiar position of Catholicism in Communist Cuba—a position quite different from the one it had in other societies that had been torn by revolutionary upheavals. Compared with the harsh measures dealt to the Church in France after 1789, in Russia after 1917, in China after 1945, and even in Spain from 1936 to 1939, the treatment of Catholics in revolutionary Cuba, though

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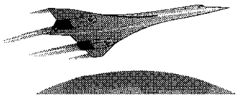

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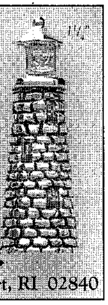

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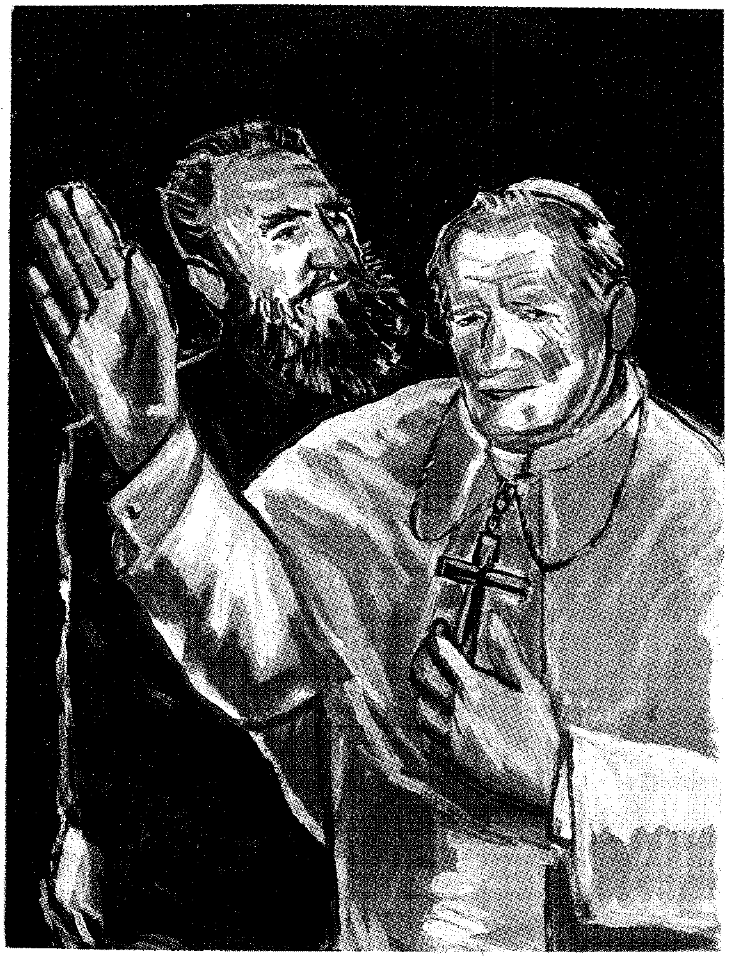
hardly enviable, has been by no means severe. There has been no systematic violence against the Church, and there was never an outright ban against religious practice. The Cuban Church has been allowed to operate more or less independently, at the unpredictable pleasure of the state. The hand of the regime was often heavier in the Eastern Bloc than in Cuba, where the authorities might exile a priest one day and send nuns cookies the next. Moreover, as the remarks of the young people I talked with made clear, the new generation of Cuban Catholics sees similarities between the social goals of the Revolution and the social mission of the Church.



Fidel regards himself and the Pope as the only world leaders willing to condemn capitalism for widening the gap between rich and poor.

FELIZ PADRON

Now it is apparent that Fidel Castro and Pope John Paul II sense some common purpose as well. Over the past two decades, they have been making fitful progress toward their historic public encounter this week in Havana. There have been frequent breakdowns, to be sure, along the way. (One Cuban friend of mine compared the process to the island's traditional *danzón*, in which dancers approach each other, then step back or turn away, only to approach again.) Yet the underlying impetus for this meeting has been strong enough to overcome all obstacles. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave it a new urgency and, by the same token, mooted Cold War objections to it. John Paul II, having helped destabilize the Communist governments of Eastern Europe, is dismayed by the corrosive materialism that has now taken hold there. One friend who has had meetings with Castro told me recently that Fidel regards himself and the Pope as the only world leaders willing to condemn the triumphalist neoliberal capitalism that both believe is widening the gap between rich and poor, especially in developing countries. To be sure, the superstructure of Castro's anticapitalism is Communist, historical materialist, and secularist, whereas that of John Paul II is anti-Communist, spiritual, and formally religious. These are not trivial differences. But, with Communism dead as a global model and capitalism sweeping everything before it—even in Cuba—both men can afford to pay attention to the points where their views and interests converge. Both men, after all, are visionaries, and both, as a matter of philosophical belief, reject the free market's implicit view of mankind as the sum of its material wants.

Can the transcendent social vision of the Revolution be squared with the transcendent spiritual vision of the Church? One of the Pope's favorite quotations is from St. John of the Cross: "At the sunset of our lives, we shall be tested in love." As Castro and John Paul consider what they will leave behind when darkness falls, these two masters of symbolism see great value in standing together against what both see, in different but overlapping ways, as the forces that threaten to undo the work of their lives. They believe, each for his own reasons, that this gesture may have a profound effect on the future of Cuba and of Latin America.

When I returned to Cuba, last month, I again accompanied the director of the Northeast Hispanic Catholic Center, but this time, in anticipation of the Pope's visit, our group carried enough liturgical vessels, vestments, medals, and altar books to staff a parish. The Cuban customs official waved our cargo through with a smile.

Our host on this trip, Jaime Lucas Cardinal Ortega y Alamino, who since 1981 has been Archbishop of Havana, reminded us that most Catholics initially supported the Cuban Revolution. At the time of Castro's victory, in 1959, Ortega recalled, he was on vacation from his seminary studies, in the city of Matanzas, and accompanied the bishop when he greeted Castro as he and his guerrilla band passed by on their way to Havana. There was enthusiasm for Fidel among bishops and priests, he said, and the Church supported the agrarian reform decreed by the new revolutionary government.

But when the Communist Party's power began to grow within the new government, Catholic leaders of the Revolution were purged and the government began to accuse the Church of harboring disloyal nuns and priests. In May of 1961, it nationalized all of the island's private schools, most of which had been run by the Catholic Church. After the Church publicly condemned the schools takeover, pro-government mobs appeared outside churches and demanded the arrest or deportation of "counterrevolutionary" priests. In September of 1961, a hundred and thirty-one priests and other clergy were expelled from the country.

"What were we to think?" Cardinal Ortega said during a conversation we had last month in Havana. "The models that we had in mind to interpret all this were frightening. We knew about the Church in Eastern Europe, with cardinals, bishops, and priests arrested or killed, and, in certain places, the Church totally deprived of any way of pursuing its mission. We had many Spanish priests in Cuba who remembered vividly what had happened in Spain under Socialist influence. This was one reason that the Cuban hierarchy reacted so strongly to the imposition of official atheism."

LA ISLA

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—Guillermo Cabrera Infante

In spite of the deportations, the Cuban government maintained its ties to the Vatican, and the Church was allowed to deploy personnel in Cuba without interference. In the liberal atmosphere of Vatican II, Havana's Archbishop Francisco Oves Fernández wanted to reduce tensions between the Church and the revolutionary government. But that atmosphere changed. In 1979, the newly elected Pope John Paul II made an important theological speech. In part, the Pope was reacting to the growing popularity among Latin-American Catholics of liberation theology, a philosophy that some activists maintained could interpret the Christian Gospel through the struggle for liberation. Many bishops had sought guidance on these matters, and John Paul II provided it, declaring that such an approach reduced human needs and Christ's teaching to totally materialistic considerations and was not profound enough to express the true nature of man or faith.

The irony, of course, was that the Pope cared deeply about the plight of the poor and sympathized with revolutionary movements. Long before the spread of liberation theology, Karol Wojtyla, as a young cleric in Kraków, understood that authentic faith could be expressed only by interacting with the events of history. In the nineteen-fifties, he wrote a play about Adam Chmielowski—a turn-of-the-century Polish freedom fighter and painter who gave up everything to serve the homeless, and had shared their life and their poverty. In Act I of this play, Adam laments that most people "escape to little islands of luxury, the so-called social life . . . and feel secure." But, he goes on, "this security is a big lie . . . that makes us ignore what cries out to be heard and suppresses a justified outbreak." A character called the Stranger (who may be modelled on Lenin) advocates a violent revolution, and at the end of the play a revolution has begun. Adam says that he expected it, and that it had to come, but that he himself has chosen a greater freedom—a life of ministry to the poor—because man's needs are greater than material goods can satisfy.

ALTHOUGH Castro, in the early years of his rule, frequently criticized what he saw as an alliance between the Church hierarchy and rich landowners—and that criticism, if not the repressive actions that stemmed from it, was not without some justification in Latin America—he has never attacked religious faith per se. Indeed, at times during his adolescence he appeared to be quite devout. In the early nineteen-forties, Castro was attending a distinguished Jesuit school in Havana. According to Ortega, the young Fidel was regarded as one of the students most likely to become Jesuit priests.

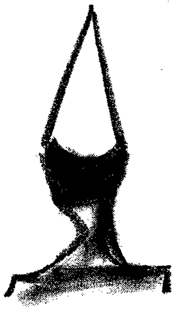
Castro made an early overture to John Paul II in 1979, when the newly elected Pope made his first foreign trip, to Mexico. The Cuban government offered Havana as a refuelling stop for the Pope's plane on its way back to Rome, and suggested that some kind of religious ceremony could be held at the airport. But it was too late, because arrangements had already been made for a papal stop in the Bahamas. In any case, at that time some of Cuba's bishops opposed a papal visit, on the ground that it might appear to legitimate Castro's regime.

Both Castro and the Church leaders were maneuvering with one eye on the exile community—an important offstage player in all Cuban conflicts. Many of the Miami-based leaders of the powerful United States community of Cuban émigrés consider themselves victims of religious as well as political persecution. A position of uncompromising militancy toward Castro is deeply ingrained in most Miami Cubans' psychology. Consequently, the exiles have been much less eager than the island's own Catholics for a rapprochement between the Church and the Castro regime. The Cuban American National Foundation has stated, "We so welcome the Pope's trip to Cuba. His record in rejecting the inherent inhumanity of systems such as Castro's is known to all. We only hope that the Pope will hear the cries for justice from Castro's victims—whether their final resting places be in a mass grave near the bloodstained firing-squad walls, the bottom of the sea, or unmarked graves outside the dark, dank cells of the Cuban gulag."

The exiles' rigid anti-Castro views carry great weight with American politicians, who court their vote, but considerably less weight with the Church hierarchy in the United States. The American Church hierarchy has always reached out to bolster the Cuban bishops' status in Cuba, even when those bishops seemed inclined toward peaceful coexistence with Castro.

JAIME ORTEGA, now sixty-one, who succeeded Oves in 1981, is a man of exceptionally serene disposition. He considers himself a realist about the Church's situation in Cuba. Even prior to the Revolution, Cuba was the most secular of the Latin-American countries. Now the Church can claim fewer than five million baptized Catholics there, out of a population of eleven million, and many of them are nonpracticing. Ortega wants the Church to survive and grow in Cuba, not in exile.

By the early seventies, Castro, apparently realizing that the Revolution was stagnating, began efforts to draw disaffected groups into public life. In 1985, he granted a long interview to the Brazilian theologian Frei Betto, in which he rejected the Marxist view of religion as the opium of the people, and said, with typical oratorical brio, "I am certain that upon the same pillars on which today reposes the sacrifice of a revolutionary there reposed yesterday the sacrifice of a martyr for his religious faith." In the same year, the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party established an Office of Religious Affairs to deal with the special problems of the island's several faiths.



Following this overture, in 1988, John Cardinal O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York, visited Cuba, to honor Father Félix Francisco José María de la Concepción Varela y Morales—a hero of the struggle for Cuban independence, who was exiled in 1823 by the Spanish colonial government, and who eventually founded two Catholic parishes for New York City's Irish immigrants.

When the Cardinal celebrated an evening Mass in Havana's cathedral, he was greeted with thunderous applause as he proceeded up the aisle to the altar. He was also pelted with little pieces of paper bearing the names of political prisoners in Cuba for whom he might intercede. The people expected Cardinal O'Connor to have an extended conversation with Fidel Castro, and they were right. Castro requested an interview, which ran from about eleven-thirty that night to three-thirty in the morning. During this meeting, O'Connor presented the names of political prisoners whom he hoped might be released. He also asked Castro to allow more pastors into the prisons and into barracks where people with AIDS were quarantined, and to permit the Church to import a printing press.

The startling possibility of a papal visit was aired for the first time in 1989, during a visit to Cuba by the president of the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace. An official invitation from the Cuban bishops (with support from Cuba's government) was issued that same year. While the visit was being planned, however, Castro suddenly changed his mind. When he was in Brazil in 1991, and the Archbishops of Havana and Santiago were in the Vatican arranging the last details of the Pope's visit, Castro publicly accused the Cuban bishops of colluding with the United States. The visit was called off.

A high Vatican official told me recently that the preparations had gone as far as selecting a specific day for the Pope's arrival. Once the Cuban bishops were in Rome, however, they sensed opposition to the visit from some members of the Curia and asked an American bishop to intercede with the Pope. When news of this reached Castro, he was very angry.

Cardinal Ortega believes that Castro might have been looking for an excuse to postpone the visit, because his real concern was the perilous state of the Cuban economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The technology, the trade agreements, and the economic aid that had sustained the

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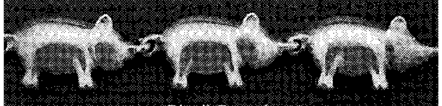

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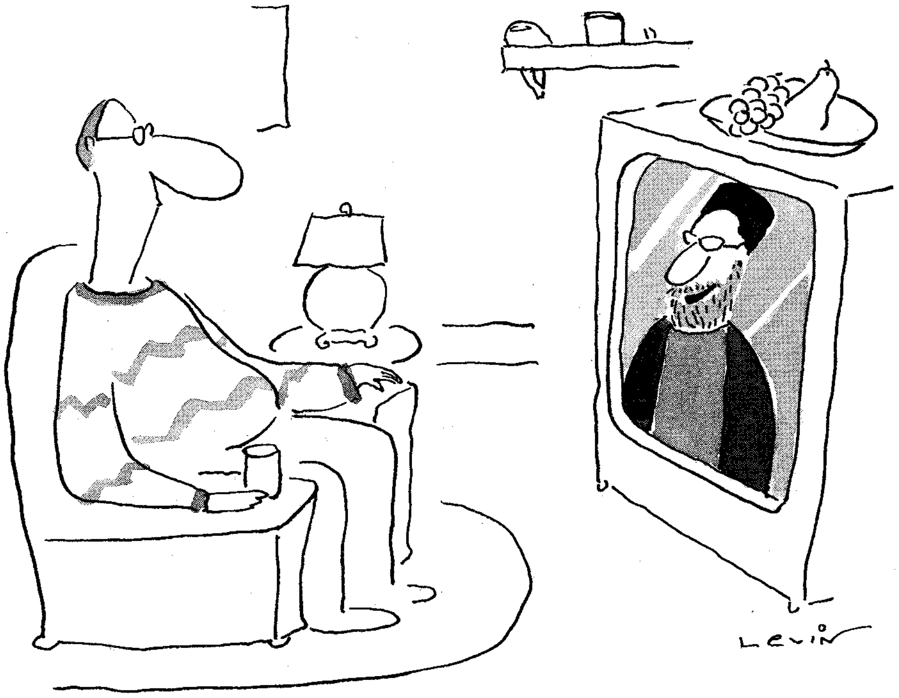
Revolution during the U.S. embargo were falling apart. Imports, particularly fuel, had begun to drop dangerously. Economic chaos was spreading. And, with the cheers of joyous crowds who had welcomed the Pope in Warsaw and Prague still reverberating, there would have been real danger in stirring up the Cuban people with a huge, emotional public event—particularly one with the Polish Pope at its center.

Throughout the early nineteen-nineties, relations between the regime and the Church seesawed. The government authorized the admission of believers into the Party in 1991, and in 1992 officially dropped atheism in favor of "secularism." Nevertheless, the next year the Cuban bishops issued a pastoral letter that painted a dismal picture of the economic, social, and moral state of Cuban society after thirty-four years of revolutionary government, and blamed the regime for the exodus of refugees. On the island, many people were in "internal exile," idolizing everything foreign, the bishops wrote. And now that Cubans were allowed to accept dollar remittances from those who had been made exiles, they argued, why not acknowledge the exiles' right to contribute in other ways to the solution of Cuba's many problems? At a meeting in Rome, John Paul II strongly endorsed this statement. The government was furious.

Still, John Paul II made statements in 1993 which suggested that there might be a basis for a dialogue with Castro. Visiting Latvia that year, the Pope deplored a vertiginous rush to materialism and corruption in the countries of the former Soviet empire. In his early-eighties encyclicals on work, the Pope had championed the laboring classes against the depredations of capitalism. And now, in Latvia, he acknowledged that the exploitation of the proletariat was "Marxism's kernel of truth," although Marx's solution was destined to fail because it deprived people of "a transcendent reference." Yet he concluded that the system of free-market liberalism was also inadequate to address all of mankind's needs.

As for Latin America—one of the few regions of the world, according to the United Nations, where poverty increased between 1987 and 1993—the Pope later told a Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops that he believed that an unfettered "globalization" was producing social injustice.

And so the *danzón* played on, with the Pope continuing to dispatch high-level officials to Cuba on various pretexts and with Castro continuing to receive them. In November of 1996, Castro arranged to have a private audience with John Paul II in Rome during a visit to the United Nations' World Food Summit.



"We are interested in a cultural exchange. We will give you one of our writers, and you will give us Salman Rushdie."

When I walked around Havana with Cardinal Ortega last month, I was struck by how few people seemed to recognize the island's highest-ranking Catholic prelate. But perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised. The Church operates, for the most part, unmolested, but it still has no access to television or to newspapers, and has only a primitive capacity for printing its own materials. (Cardinal Ortega was finally allowed to appear on TV last week, but whether the Pope's Masses will be televised remains a topic of frantic last-minute negotiations.) Then, too, I was struck by a pervasive air of sadness. Even the people involved with the growing tourist business seemed to be just going through the motions of creating a tourist-friendly environment. They smiled, and welcomed the tourists in the hotels, stores, and restaurants, but something was missing. Finally, I was astonished at the degree to which the United States dollar has become Cuba's de-facto currency, for even the humblest consumer goods and services. Of all the ironies of Castro's Cuba, one of the most poignant is that after nearly four decades of Communist rule and U.S. embargo, the coin of the revolutionary realm is the almighty dollar.

A Havana priest who has friends close to Castro told me that Fidel thinks there has been a moral crisis in Cuba since the fall of the Soviet empire, and that he is concerned about a loss of ethical values and (lay) spirituality in society. He hopes the Pope's visit will instill a new sense of moral purpose, which could carry forward the Revolution's aims after his death.

As for the Pope's expectations, he remains, at heart, an artist and philosopher, who believes that the most profound human reality can be communicated only through myth, poetry, art, and ritual. He has written extensively about how the language of the body can communicate man's inner self, which finds its greatest expression in the spontaneous gesture. That is why Pope John Paul II wants so much to be physically in Cuba—to kiss the ground, kneel before the island's most holy shrine, the Virgin of Charity, touch Cuban hands, bless Cuban children.

In a 1974 poem, which Václav Havel quoted when welcoming the Pope to Prague, Karol Wojtyla wrote:

> History lays down events over the struggles of conscience. Victories throb inside this layer, and defeats. History does not cover them: it makes them stand out.
> Can history ever flow against the current of conscience?

Fidel Castro is the man who, when the Batista regime put him on trial for sedition, in 1953, said, "History will absolve me." On January 21st, he will welcome a man of conscience.

It is possible that Castro himself may be going through something like a revival of religious interest. "It is very difficult to read his mind and heart," Bernard Cardinal Law, Archbishop of Boston, who has met with Castro, told me recently. "One can presume, however, that there has been a change in his appreciation of the Church and her mission. He has been willing to expand the scope of the Church's freedom these last years—not without ups and downs. As to his own religious questioning, it seems to me that, given this change of attitude, it cannot be excluded. It appears that his meeting with the Pope in Rome, a year ago November, made a deep personal impression on him."

Indeed, Castro has told friends how moved he was by his audience with John Paul II. Many Cubans have also remarked on the look on Castro's face during that meeting, a photograph of which now appears on a huge government poster announcing the Pope's visit. Castro is holding the Pope's hands, looking at him humbly, with an almost childlike expression. This is a side of Castro that the Cuban people have never seen before, so the Pope, even before he arrives, has accomplished an important goal. His primary aim, a Vatican official explained to me, is to give the Cuban people a new perspective on life—on what the Pope calls the human reality—as they begin a new stage in their history. If all goes well (and this is a constant concern for both Castro and the Church), a visit made up of a series of such images—where history and conscience meet—could open up a new stage in the evolution of Cuban life. ♦

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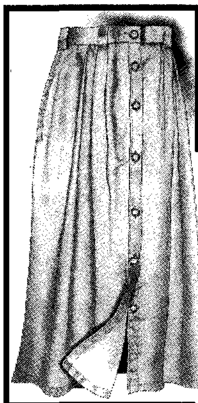

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PROFILE

CASTRO'S SUCCESSOR?

Ricardo Alarcón seems the man best fitted to follow Fidel—and the least likely to leave things as they are.

BY WALTER RUSSELL MEAD

IT is Candidates' Night in a Havana University dormitory, and students have gathered in a crowded cafeteria to hear the three candidates running for the three local seats in the National Assembly of People's Power, Cuba's highest legislative body. The main speaker, and the man I have come to Cuba to see, is Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, who has been the president of the National Assembly since 1993. Especially in recent years, Cuba's greatest achievements have been diplomatic: negotiating an immigration accord with the United States in 1994, winning lopsided majorities in the United Nations for resolutions condemning the U.S. embargo against Cuba. Next to Fidel Castro, credit for these achievements goes to Alarcón, Cuba's point man in negotiations with the United States, its Ambassador to the United Nations for almost fifteen years, and, after Castro, the most visible face, internationally, of the Cuban government.

Alarcón, running unopposed, is not worried about losing his National Assembly seat. Even so, he's working. At sixty, he is lean and fit, and he looks like a much younger man. The students, racially mixed and casually dressed, stand around chatting. The thick, stale smell of bad dormitory food hangs in the air.

The three candidates are announced, and Alarcón steps forward, looking very much like a national politician at a down-home event: better dressed than his audience, more polished in his delivery than the amateurs making the presentations. He is short, almost delicately formed, and has a large head.

Alarcón, who has been introduced as "a tireless fighter against imperialism and for Cuba," begins in a soft voice, forcing the students to gradually quiet down and listen. As he continues, he becomes more animated, shaking his fists, waving his arms, cracking jokes, and pouring sarcasm on his target, the United States. Still, this is an intellectual, not a populist, talking: Adlai Stevenson, not George Wallace.

Alarcón unfolds a copy of the Miami *Herald* and holds it up, turning it from side to side so that everyone in the room can see it. There appears to be a picture of a woman on the front page, and Alarcón tells us that although she didn't go to the polls, she discovered that she had nevertheless voted for one of the candidates, a Cuban-American running for mayor. "What a great democracy this is—you don't even have to go to the polls to vote," he says scornfully.

"And the famous two-party system that the Yankees talk about all the time?" he asks, putting the newspaper aside and stepping closer to the students. "I'll tell you how it works. I'll give you an example. There are two brothers in Florida. One brother is named Pepe, one brother is named Alfie. Pepe lives in one part of the house, Alfie lives in another. Pepe grows sugarcane for a living; Alfie grows sugarcane for a living." Alarcón's hands illustrate his words—sketching a house, cutting sugarcane.

And every election year, he continues, Pepe gives money to the Republicans and Alfie gives money to the Democrats. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to one side, two hundred and fifty thousand to the other. And sometimes Pepe's candidate wins and sometimes Alfie's candidate wins, but the two brothers win no matter what. Both parties support a subsidy to keep the price of sugar high. And, no matter who wins the election, the people pay taxes that end up supporting Pepe and Alfie.

"That—that is the system that the North Americans are so proud of," Alarcón says. "That is the system they want to impose on the rest of the world." He pauses, so that the audience can digest this enormity.

Now the tone shifts. "But in Cuba," he says, "we have a different system, a better system." Here there are no campaign contributions, no Pepes and Alfies manipulating the system. And when you go to vote you are alone with your conscience. The vote is absolutely secret.

He finishes and asks for questions. There aren't any. Someone stands and calls for a cheer for the *comandante en jefe*, Fidel Castro. The students oblige with what sounds like real enthusiasm, and the meeting breaks up.

RICARDO ALARCÓN is in a position to win something much bigger than a seat in the National Assembly: in a very oblique, very Cuban, way, he is pursuing the Presidency of Cuba. The campaign to lead Cuba after Castro dies or retires may be the most important event on the island since the Revolution, and the race for the succession was started last fall by Castro himself. "We now live in different times," Castro, who is seventy-one, told the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in October. Calling for collective leadership when the Castro brothers pass beyond politics, Fidel went on to say, "I hope you will be able to count on [Raúl] for many years to come, but the question is not Raúl or Fidel. . . . We have to guarantee continuity when neither Raúl nor Fidel is here." This was Castro's most explicit reference to an impending departure from public life, and it comes at a time when concern over the health of both Castro brothers runs high. Fidel made infrequent public appearances for much of 1996 and 1997, and reportedly underwent extensive medical treatment for an undisclosed illness last summer. Raúl,

Alarcón with his conversational aid: "I see him as a real reformer," a former top U.S. diplomat says. Photograph by Ernesto Bazan.

THE END OF MY PATIENCE IS NEAR

five years younger than his brother, is rumored to suffer from cirrhosis of the liver.

The transition to the post-Castro era may not be quick: power is not only an aphrodisiac; it is also a longevity drug. Yet Alarcón, who is a member of the Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party, is being openly discussed as the possible next President. Late last year, Alarcón himself said in an interview that, in the event of Fidel's death or retirement, he would not turn down the Presidency if that was what the Party wanted.

There are other signs. Some Cuban religious and cultural leaders are going out of their way in conversations with foreigners to praise Alarcón. And on January 1st the majority of the *babalawos*, the priests of Cuba's immensely influential Afro-Cuban religious tradition, released their annual New Year's predictions. They said that 1998 will be a critical year for the heads of things, and that "the parliamentarian" will be a main topic. (The National Assembly is widely referred to in Cuba as "the parliament.")

It is not only Alarcón's diplomatic credentials that give him an important role in the new Cuban politics. It can be argued that as president of the National Assembly he technically heads the most powerful institution in Cuba. And in the generational transition now under way he stands between the old revolutionary core and the more modern and (a dirty word in Cuba) technocratic men in their late thirties and early forties who will one day succeed them. He is eleven years younger than Fidel Castro and fourteen years older than Carlos Lage, the pediatrician turned economist who, in the wake of the East bloc's collapse, has led the country through a partial but painful economic-reform process.

It may be too early for non-*babalawos* to predict the winner in the Cuban Presidential process, yet speculation about the nature of an Alarcón Presidency is growing. Jay Taylor, chief of the United States Interests Section in Havana under Presidents Reagan and Bush, told me that Alarcón "could potentially emerge as the Deng Xiaoping of Cuba—the man who implements economic reforms while preserving political stability." A predecessor of Taylor's in Havana, Wayne Smith, is even more optimistic. "I see him as a real reformer," he says, "somebody who could preside over a real opening—gradually and carefully—of Cuban society. He's not afraid of new ideas."

LATE one afternoon in December, a taxi dropped me in front of an unimpressive little building in western Havana—the auxiliary offices of the National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba. Cuba's parliament, I had been told, "looks like a budget motel." As the taxi drove off, I noticed a man waiting by the door; he greeted me in English and ushered me inside. Without doing a security check or taking precautions of any kind, he took me into a large, uncarpeted, windowless, but blessedly air-conditioned room. "Ricardo will be with you shortly," he said.

I made a quick inventory of the furnishings: wicker chairs and a couch, scattered coffee tables, a Cuban flag, a likeness of José Martí, Cuba's national hero in the struggle for independence from Spain. A long bookcase stood against one wall, and carefully arranged on its shelves were dozens of political mementos—flags, Lucite plaques, arts-and-crafts trinkets from parliaments, political parties, and governments around the world. Many of them acknowledged Ricardo Alarcón's presence at some event or congratulated him for something. I wondered what the local politicians Alarcón met with here thought of these testimonials from places like Germany and Ghana, and what Alarcón himself thought of his relatively new role at the National Assembly, so different from the diplomatic stage, where he had spent most of his career.

Alarcón, who is fluent in English and knowledgeable about the United States (he reportedly reads the *Times*, the Washington *Post*, and a press summary every day), has become the man whom visiting United States politicians and journalists are most likely to see, and all my previous visits to Cuba had featured at least one meeting with him. I first encountered him in 1994, when I came to Cuba with a group of development specialists and human-rights activists. We drove out to La Ferminia, an elegant restaurant on the western outskirts of Havana, where Alarcón joined us for dinner. The restaurant occupies a magnificent antique-filled mansion. (The manager told me that it had been "donated" to the Cuban government by the family who owned it in 1971, shortly before they left the island forever.) Even at a time of national economic trauma, it was filled with stylish, well-dressed Cubans, including a surprising number of elegant young women whose life styles did not seem unduly cramped either by Communism or by the U.S. embargo.

In a private dining room I watched Mike Farrell, who was Captain B. J. Hunnicutt, on "M*A*S*H," and is now a human-rights activist, challenge Alarcón about dissidents and writers in Cuba. Worldly and self-assured, Alarcón—brandy in one hand, cigar in the other—parried Farrell's thrusts. His countercharges about the United States and his defense of the Cuban Revolution could have been the boilerplate responses of any functionary of any regime. Yet Alarcón—ironic, sarcastic, funny—always seemed engaged. As waiters took away old courses and brought in new ones, he listened intently, shrugging his shoulders sometimes to concede a point, wagging his finger to make one in return. The cigar never left his hand, but he used it largely as a conversational aid—an extra finger to add emphasis to important points. Even at his most serious, he would break into an admiring smile when an opponent said something funny or smart.

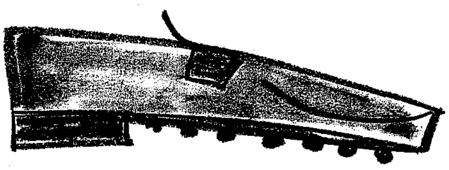
Yet Alarcón does not hide his anger. I had dinner with him in April of 1996, about six weeks after Cuban MIG fighters shot down two unarmed planes flown by the Miami-based exile group Brothers to the Rescue, and he seemed an entirely different man from the host of a few months before. Again he held a cigar, this time stabbing the air with it as he attacked Elizardo Sánchez, the president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation and the most celebrated dissident now living on the island. Sánchez had allegedly provided information to American news organizations during the crisis, including the controversial, government-funded Radio Martí and Television Martí, whose advisory boards were then headed by a Castro foe, the late Jorge Mas Canosa. "Don't make a mistake," Alarcón said. "We know how to deal with these people." He added that Sánchez—a mild-mannered, moderate dissident—faced jail if he continued to work with the U.S. press.

I had returned to Cuba this time to learn more about Ricardo Alarcón. I wanted to see what had made him so determined a rebel for so long, and how he reconciled his cosmopolitan nature with the narrower interests of Cuban nationalism and Castro's revolution. I was curious, too, about what side of his complicated personality would be visible at this critical moment in Cuban history, when the hard-won achievements of a lifetime seemed to be in jeopardy.

"I got involved in politics in a very casual way," Alarcón said when he joined me in the reception room at the National Assembly offices. That may be true, but Alarcón has been a rebel virtually all his life, and the goals of Cuban independence and social justice were intimately woven into his sense of identity from an early age.

His father was a low-level office worker who had to drop out of elementary school to earn a living. "He was an intelligent man," Alarcón told me, "but he was never given the opportunity to develop." At night and on holidays, he would read books on subjects like the pre-Socratic philosophers and the philosophy of law; Ricardo grew up convinced that markets don't reward talent and that capitalism is profoundly unfair. His mother's family, the de Quesadas, were from a different background. How different I learned in conversation with Miguel Barnet, perhaps contemporary Cuba's best-known novelist and literary personality. "The de Quesadas are one of the best lineages in Cuba, the most patriotic, the most aristocratic," Barnet told me. They traced their descent from some of the most famous figures in Cuban history, although they had lost almost all their money long before Ricardo was born.

FOR the young Alarcón, poverty was a humiliating and frustrating fact of life. At the Catholic school he attended, the brothers would read out in front of the whole class the names of boys whose families were delinquent with tuition payments. Alarcón's name was always on that list. He grew up introverted, awkward, and bookish. His brother-in-law, Andrés Montes, says, "He was quiet and didn't like to talk—unless the subject was politics." As a student at Havana University, he would argue politics long into the night, and in the late fifties, when the university students were catapulted into the front ranks of revolutionary politics, he showed a flair for organizing strikes.



His presence and his charm when he was talking politics did not go unnoticed by Margarita Perea, a university classmate, whom he later married. During a sophomore-year sociology class, Alarcón made a presentation, and, forty-five years later, Margarita still remembers it: "It was the green eyes. I always liked men with green eyes. He was wearing mustard-yellow pants. And he was so intelligent. I said to myself, 'I want a man like this one.' "

The coup d'état of Fulgencio Batista, in March, 1952, brought increasing repression. A small minority of the radical students, including Alarcón, joined the July 26 Movement, an anti-Batista group supporting Fidel Castro and his guerrillas, who were then based in the mountains of remote Oriente. Within a few years, Alarcón—who had never met Fidel—had become one of the Castroite underground leaders in the capital city. "You would see him sitting on his front porch calmly reading a book," a friend once said, "and never suspect that he was up to his neck in the underground."

As the repression intensified, Alarcón was forced underground, but he stopped by Margarita's home whenever he could. Friends and family told Margarita, the daughter of a woman who supported her family by giving piano lessons, that she was crazy to waste her time with a penniless revolutionary on the run from the cops. But Margarita shared his political zeal, and she herself was jailed briefly after a demonstration against Batista. As far as she was concerned, Alarcón's revolutionary politics made him more attractive.

Insiders say that Alarcón also made enemies during this era. Raúl Castro, Che Guevara, and other guerrillas who were in the mountains with Fidel never trusted the "bourgeois liberals" who organized the resistance in the cities, although Che came to like Alarcón when he finally met him. Communists like the late Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, who became a deputy president of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers, reportedly distrusted Alarcón as too liberal. In later years, such hard-liners—or "Stalinists," as Havana intellectuals call them—did their best to keep him out of Fidel's inner circle.

Nevertheless, after Fidel seized power, in January of 1959, Alarcón proved adept at drawing non-Communists into Castro's camp, thus coming to the attention of senior government officials. In 1962, at the age of twenty-five, he was summoned to join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the head of its Latin-American division. Promotions were swift in those post-Revolution days. Three years later, he was the head of the division that handled all the Americas; by 1966, still only twenty-nine years old, he had been appointed Castro's Ambassador to the United Nations.

ALARCÓN never quite shed the liberal taint, and as the Cuban Revolution settled into a routine he became unpopular with politically orthodox bureaucrats. Critics said that he was disorganized, while those who are intimate with him defend him, saying that he's "a revolutionary, not a functionary."

In the seventies, when Cuban Sovietizers tried to subject Cuban artists to the narrow dogmas of socialist realism, Alarcón, in quasi-exile in New York, quietly went on reading his favorite modernist authors: Proust, Faulkner, and Joyce. Margarita, whom he married in 1960, and who went with him to New York, says that the only thing he ever bought on credit was a coveted edition of Proust.

Now, at the National Assembly offices, I asked him what he thought he would have been if he hadn't gone into politics. He didn't hesitate: "Probably a writer of some kind. Prose fiction, perhaps poetry." He wrote in his student days, he said, "and again at the U.N., sometimes late at night, as a kind of spiritual exercise. I would stay up and try to write fiction." He snorted and laughed when I asked him if any of this writing survives. "The attempts survive," he said.

Another day at the National Assembly building, I met Alarcón's daughter, Maggie, who is practically a New Yorker. "I know," she said. "You can't believe I'm Cuban. It's always the same. People say to me, 'You sound like the lady who works in the drugstore.' But, remember, my father worked at the U.N. for fifteen years. I've lived half my life in New York."

Does she want her father to be President of Cuba? "It might be good for the country," she said, "but it would be bad for me. I don't want to be the first daughter—I'm no Chelsea Clinton. It's ridiculous. Just look at it: Her cat is named Socks. My cat could never be First Cat—he's named Wodka."

Thanks to Maggie, I now knew such things as what TV show Alarcón had liked to watch in the seventies while he was living in New York: Carol Burnett. I knew that he is a Woody Allen fan, and that "Manhattan" is one of his favorite films. I knew that he doesn't drive but is a terrible back-seat driver, and criticizes his wife's driving so much that she once stopped the car and told him to either shut up or get out. I knew that he had once dropped a platter his wife handed him because it was too large to grasp with one hand and he wouldn't put down the cigar that he was holding in the other. "What kind of an idiot have I married?" she yelled at him.

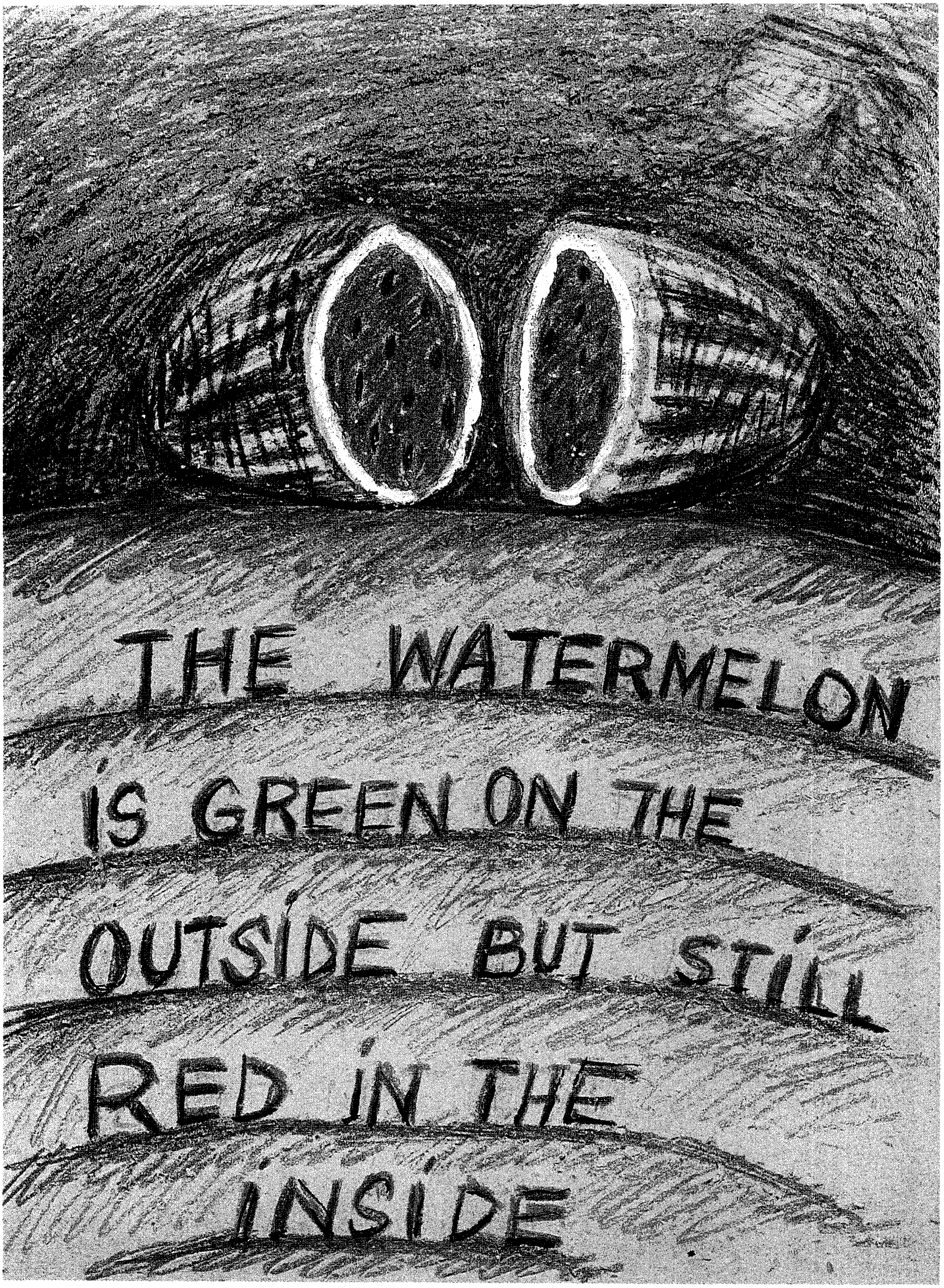
MY next meeting with Alarcón lasted all evening and well into the night. Aides brought out rum and cigars, and Alarcón became expansive. "The Cuban Revolution means everything to me," he said. "And my family. And they are the same: my wife is a beautiful revolutionary." I wondered if I could meet her. This was asking a lot: the socialist camp, as it used to be called, prided itself on not exposing the private lives of its leaders. Moreover, Alarcón's wife suffers from Parkinson's disease, and spends most of her time in a neurological institute. But he didn't say no, and later that night Margarita joined us in the National Assembly reception room, walking unsteadily but unassisted to one of the wicker chairs. Poised and elegant, she looked a decade younger than her sixty-one years. Her illness had forced her to give up many pleasures; she rarely goes to theatres or concert halls, and at times she has difficulty reading. What she misses most is attending the ballet, she said, and spoke with passion about the development of Cuban dance under the prima ballerina and choreographer Alicia Alonso.

At first, Alarcón—who aides say sleeps in the hospital by her side—hovered anxiously nearby, but he slowly relaxed as Margarita reminisced about their courtship and their life in New York. Like many other lives, theirs was stretched by the various commitments and interests of the family members. "New York restaurants saved my marriage," she said.

The later it got, the more philosophical Alarcón became. The dream of socialism had clearly lost none of its allure for him. I asked about the Gulag. "Look, Christianity survived the Inquisition and the religious wars," he answered. "Socialism will do the same." But repression was not the only mistake that the socialist camp made. I reminded him of Khrushchev's 1959 prediction that the Soviet Union would overtake the United States economically, producing more goods and making people richer. "It was a mistake for socialism to compete with capitalism on the level of material prosperity," he said. It is clearly a question that he has spent a lot of time thinking about. "Capitalist societies are willing to exclude millions of people," he went on. He was clutching an unlit cigar. "We cannot do that"—and, as a result, socialism cannot offer its upper-middle classes the same untrammelled material abundance that capitalism can offer. "Look around you," he said. "It is simply not possible for the

WATERMELON MAN

Felix Padrón was born in the port city of Matanzas, in central Cuba, in 1961, after the Revolution but before Fidel Castro announced his adherence to Marxism-Leninism. Just when people like Padrón's father, a barber who had been sympathetic to the Revolution, started noticing the country's Communist bent, a magazine appeared with a watermelon on its cover. "Like Fidel, the watermelon was green on the outside and red on the inside," Padrón explains. The artist, who left Cuba when he was ten and now lives in San Antonio, Texas, paints a watermelon every year. "One a year, every year," he says. "As long as Fidel's still there, wearing his green attire."


THE WATERMELON
IS GREEN ON THE
OUTSIDE BUT STILL
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INSIDE

masses of people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to enjoy the life style of the European and North American middle classes. Not everybody can have a car, his own house, all the material goods that he wants." It's ecologically impossible for this to happen, Alarcón argued, and that is one of the reasons that socialism remains essential. Meanwhile, smug North American capitalists should stop telling Cubans that their revolution has failed. "To pretend to tell us that we are sustaining something that is wrong and has failed is a false position," he said. "Fine, some socialist models have failed. But where in the Third World has capitalism produced masses of happy people with good clothes and clean water?"

I asked him about the deficiencies of the Cuban economy, about the hustlers and prostitutes now haunting the streets of Havana. Alarcón was not fazed. "You have countries in Latin America, where people have assaulted the supermarkets and stores and you have to have armed guards," he said. "I used to shop at a supermarket around York Avenue and Sixty-ninth, and there was a uniformed guard. Why? Because people don't have enough money to buy what they need! Nobody tells a poor man in Harlem that he can't go to Lincoln Center to buy a ticket and enjoy a concert. But there are many people in New York who could never afford to enter Lincoln Center."

As always, Alarcón was annoyed by American criticism of the human-rights situation in Cuba. "You just have to ask a simple question: Is it really your business? The U.S. never cared about elections in Zaire or Morocco or Saudi Arabia. You never interviewed dissidents in Zaire—because they were buried under the ground. You were the main supporter of Mobutu for years and years."

IN Cuba today, the older people are vigorous and alive, while the young seem tired and depressed. The collapse of the East bloc, and therefore of the Cuban economy, plunged the old revolutionaries back into the world of their youth. Once again, it is Cuba against the world, and Ricardo Alarcón is where he was in his student days: reaching out to build a national consensus behind Fidel Castro's revolutionary movement. "In my sixties, at a time when I might be getting ready to take life more slowly and write my memoirs," Alarcón told me, "I am back in the sixties—I am doing exactly what I did as a young man."

As the president of the National Assembly, Alarcón is barnstorming the country, trying to visit every province and municipality in Cuba to persuade people to support the Cuban political system. The post has given him the one thing he lacked during his years as a diplomat: the opportunity to build a domestic political base.

His relationship with Fidel remains close. According to insiders, Alarcón and Fidel meet frequently, sometimes at impromptu social occasions. In Fidel's inner circle, Alarcón may be the man who understands him best—not in the sense of predicting what he will do next but in grasping why and with what reservations he has chosen a particular course of action. And when major decisions regarding the United States need to be taken there is no one else whose opinion Fidel values so highly.

Not that Alarcón is running to be the next Fidel Castro. There will be no new Fidel; none of the leading political figures in Cuba—or, for that matter, in Miami—have the charisma or the authority to take his place. But Alarcón and a handful of other top Cuban leaders—Raúl Castro, the Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces; Abel Prieto, the Minister of Culture; the economist Carlos Lage; General Ulises Rosales del Toro, the Minister of the Sugar Industry; and a group of men who are just beginning to emerge on the national scene, like Marcos Portal, the Minister of Basic Industry, and Pedro Saenz Montero, the First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party in the province of Havana—are now in a position to win the necessary support to function as a kind of collective Presidency, in which Alarcón is ultimately

POSTCARD TO THE U.S.A.

How can one go on living
with two languages, two houses, two nostalgias,
two temptations, two kinds of melancholy?
Mother, put aside for me the Blake engravings
that are still on the shelf.
In the kitchen, next to the white bookshelf,
I used to amuse myself with Burns's epigrams and epitaphs.
Please keep that book for me.
Another year has passed
and your Communist here will not be able to visit you.

—HEBERTO PADILLA

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Alastair Reid.*)

favored to emerge as first among equals. No matter how such a Presidency were to be structured, it would not wield the power that Fidel now possesses. As Elizardo Sánchez says, "You can't make an elephant with a hundred rabbits."

Although Alarcón appears to have the backing of Fidel, his path toward a major role in Cuba's post-Castro leadership is far from assured. He still faces powerful opposition within the hard-line Cuban élite, similar to the opposition that he faced in the fifties and sixties. But his biggest obstacle is economics, not politics. Cuba's economy today is a horrifying mixture of the worst of both worlds: the material poverty of socialism and the inequality of capitalism. The Cuban economist Pedro Monreal, pointing to figures showing that a minority of the population owns a substantial majority of private financial assets on the island, acknowledged that the distribution of wealth in Cuba no longer reflects socialist ideals.

Most Cubans are desperate for a better life. It takes about a hundred dollars a month to live with any degree of comfort in Havana today; government salaries in pesos are worth about a fifth of that. Thanks to subsidized food, medicine, and rent, the peso economy can feed people—on a very basic level—for two weeks out of four. For everything else, you need dollars. In the struggle for dollars, Cubans often find themselves battling the government, which has set up state-owned tourism companies that control the hotels, the large restaurants, and the rest of the dollar industry. The "Stalinists" prefer government-owned enterprises to private enterprise on ideological grounds, but the political consequences could be explosive.

"They treat you like a dissident if you open a restaurant," says one Cuban. "The police raid you at 2 A.M. to see if you have an illegal lobster in your refrigerator." Taxi-drivers, street hustlers, and others chasing foreign dollars see the police less as an impartial force for order than as muscle protecting the privileges of the state tourism companies. And, because the police have to make a living like everybody else, they are resorting to bribery and extortion. Rising tension in the streets could set off an explosion like the riot of August, 1994; according to Monreal, the "rate of economic growth is not sufficient to satisfy the Cuban people—and it is not expected to change for a long time." Based on current projections, Cuban living standards won't return to the 1989 level until 2014.

These grim facts shape the agenda that Cuba and Alarcón must pursue. Better relations with the United States clearly offer Cuba its best hope of economic improvement and of stability after Fidel. The ultimate goal, Alarcón told me, is a rapprochement that would lead to the repeal of the Helms-Burton bill and the normalization of relations. "But that will take time," he said. "We understand that."

Given the realities of American politics, this means that Alarcón must do two things: he must reach out beyond the left-liberals, who traditionally favor improved relations, and build support for change among business and conservatives, and he must reach out to Miami, as he did in an informal televised debate with Jorge Mas Canosa in September of 1996, which marked the first direct contact between Mas and the Cuban leadership ever. Both these outreaches could cause problems with the hard-liners in Havana, but Alarcón is optimistic. "We will find a way," he says, "because we will have to find a way."

At the same time, Alarcón and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are clearly signalling that the easing of American hostility would have a sweeping effect on political conditions on the island. Carlos Fernández de Cossio, the head of the Ministry's North American division, told me that "an end to U.S. hostility could lead to a total transformation in the legal and political situation of dissidents on the island."

At the end of our second meeting at the National Assembly, Alarcón said, "The end of the embargo will bring hundreds of thousands of North American tourists to Cuba. We will welcome them. They can talk to the people here as they like. Nobody will be stopping them. And we will learn some things from them, and maybe they will learn something from us."

All this is far from saying that ending the embargo and lessening political hostility would bring what Alarcón might call bourgeois democracy to Cuba. Nor would the Alarcón candidacy survive if Cuban hard-liners thought that he was willing to make extensive political concessions to the United States in exchange for an improvement in relations. Alarcón seems to be attempting to define a new politics toward the United States—one that holds out the possibility of change over a period of time but doesn't represent a surrender.

It is a risky strategy, and, except for Fidel Castro himself, no one in Cuba but Ricardo Alarcón has the authority to pursue it. This, presumably, is why Alarcón is being considered for a new and more prominent role after Castro. It is one of the many ironies in the Cuban Revolution that Castro may well choose as a successor the man with the best chance of making peace with the United States. ◆

ANNALS OF PRESERVATION

BRINGING BACK HAVANA

The buildings and houses that made the city one of the most beautiful in the world have survived the Revolution. But will they survive capitalism?

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

IN Havana, perhaps even more than in Los Angeles, you are what you drive. Samuel González, a taxi-driver, has a red-and-white 1953 Chevrolet, which by the standards of this city, where American cars from the nineteen-fifties are among the chief ornaments of the cityscape, qualifies as a coveted vehicle, almost chic. For a long time, Mario Coyula, an architect who travels in more sophisticated circles than Samuel González, had one of Cuba's only Porsches. Now, conscious of his role as vice-director of a group overseeing architectural planning for the Havana region, he drives one of the colorless Russian-made Ladas that were the cars preferred for years by the Cuban government. Ambassadors from other countries, restricted neither by the ideology of the Revolution nor by the need to choose their cars from what happens to be around, ride in Mercedes-Benzes, but then so does Fidel Castro. And Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, an architectural historian, has no car at all.

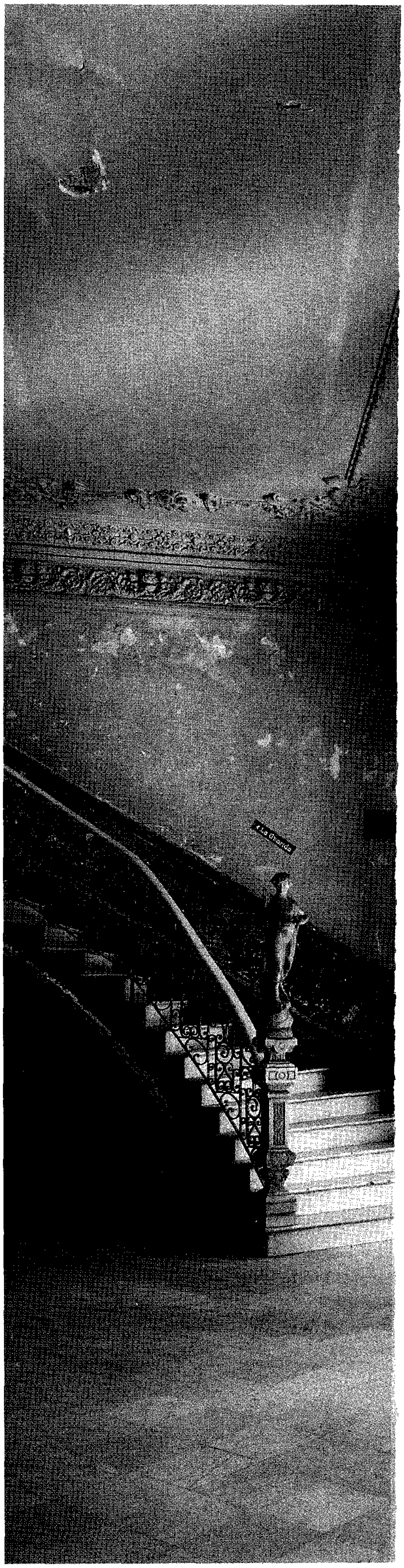
Rodríguez, who is one of the most highly respected scholars of twentieth-century Cuban architecture, has no telephone, either. He lives, with his wife and two sons, in a small apartment beneath the parish house of a church in Havana's Vedado section, and he moves around the city by bicycle. To reach him, you go to his house, walk across a tiny patio, on which sits the empty frame of a fifties sling chair, and rap on a sliding-glass door. If there is no answer, you leave a note telling Rodríguez when and where you hope to meet him. If he is not already committed, he will show up.

At thirty-eight, Rodríguez is more worldly than most Cubans: he has travelled to Europe and the United States to lecture on the architecture of his homeland. A stocky, bearded man, he has an amiable bearing, and his manner bespeaks graceful discretion more than scholarly hauteur; like many Cubans, he wears his erudition lightly. Despite his reputation abroad, he has not had an easy time as a scholar, because he does not always hew to the official line about architecture and preservation in Havana, which is, in effect, that the city is fine and that it will become even finer thanks to the work now being done by the official city historian, a man named Eusebio Leal, whose genteel title belies the fact that he has become something like the Robert Moses of Havana.

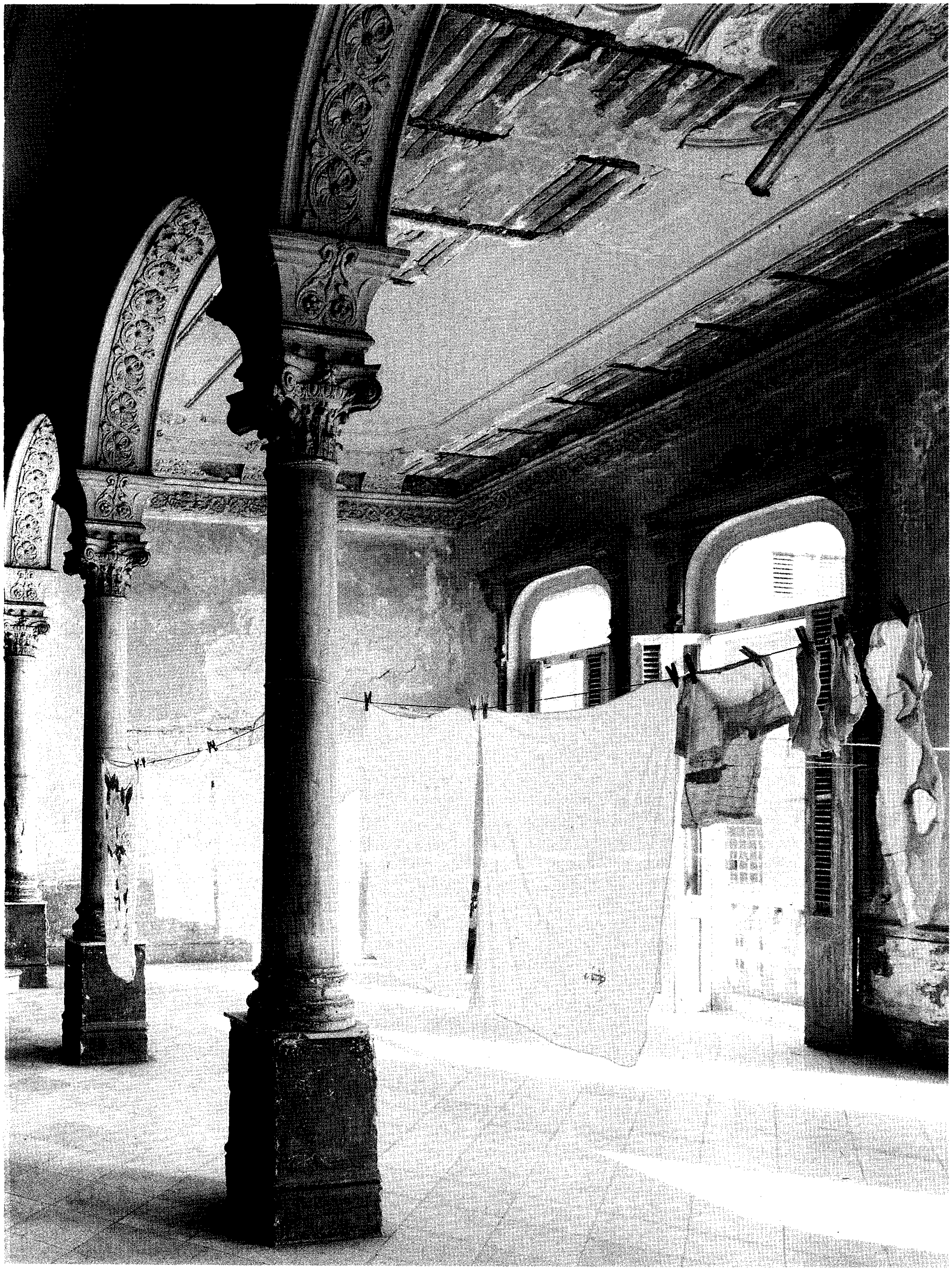
There is some disagreement about whether Havana is, in fact, so fine. The city is one of the richest and most eclectic urban environments anywhere, overflowing with architecture that is extravagant in its ambition and spectacular in its execution. But Havana is largely crumbling. Its buildings are falling down, its sewers are a mess, and its telephone system resembles that of an Eastern European city circa 1975. The Calzada del Cerro, the main street of the once prosperous El Cerro neighborhood, is one of the most remarkable streets in the world: three unbroken kilometres of nineteenth-century neoclassical villas, with columned arcades making an urban vista of heartbreaking beauty—linear monumentality of a sort that exists nowhere else, except, perhaps, in Bologna. It is now deteriorating so dangerously that when I stopped for a moment in front of one building a passerby grabbed my arm and pulled me away; the cornice, he said, looked as if it was about to collapse.

In Cuba now, the only buildings that get taken care of are the ones that bring in tourist dollars, and this situation makes local preservationists like Rodríguez fear for the city's future. While Old Havana is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and is being restored as a quaint tourist attraction—this is Eusebio Leal's project—the rest of the city seems to be viewed less as an irreplaceable artifact than

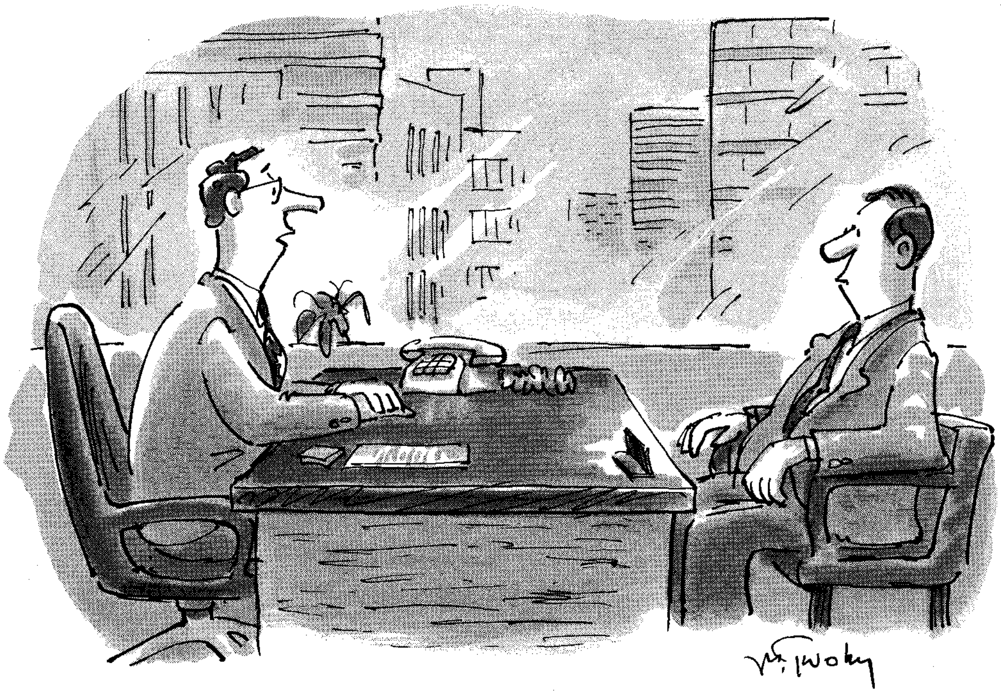
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT POLIDORI



Aristocratic architecture taken over by anoth



ass: Many of Havana's grander residences have become "ciudadelas," or little cities, in which more than a dozen families live together.



"In order to remain competitive in today's marketplace, Bentham, I'm afraid we're going to have to replace you with a sleazeball."

as turf on which Cuba can play out its romance with capitalism.

A glimpse of the Havana that Rodríguez fears appeared two years ago in the form of the Hotel Meliá Cohiba, a shrill, twenty-two-story tower of brown marble and reflective glass erected by a Spanish hotel chain in the hope of attracting tourists and businesspeople. It sits next to the Riviera, the flashy hotel erected by Meyer Lansky just before Castro came to power, which is a prize relic of fifties architecture. Beside the Cohiba, the Riviera looks as venerable as a Renaissance palazzo. And last November the Carlos III Mall, four stories of shops and fast-food outlets around a central atrium, opened up in the center of Havana, providing a taste of Paramus, New Jersey, within blocks of the Plaza of the Revolution and its three-story-high bas-relief of the face of Che Guevara. In a city that, despite the deprivations of socialism, has always been known for its vibrant street life, the mall is an ominous symbol: it represents not just capitalism, but suburban American capitalism.

No one believes that Havana will remain as it is for much longer. That American investment is forbidden has not prevented Havana from becoming ever more American in its way of doing business. The question, however, is what American model the city will embrace—sprawl and high-rises in the manner of south Florida, or more sanitized renovations of its older buildings designed to attract tourists.

Eduardo Luis Rodríguez rejects both scenarios, and wants to see, instead, a Havana in which Art Deco palaces from the nineteen-thirties and good modernist architecture from the nineteen-fifties are as carefully restored as the city's nineteenth-century colonial buildings. "The government, the potential investors, they do not have any consciousness of the breadth of twentieth-century architecture in Havana, where we received every style in a very short period," he said. "But unlike the colonial buildings, none of it is protected." Rodríguez's passionate feelings about preservation in Havana have occasionally put him in disfavor. In a speech in 1995, in Washington, D.C., he said that he thought the Castro government should establish strong regulations for foreign investors to insure that new projects would not jeopardize Havana's architectural heritage. "I said something that was not politically correct, and I was told that what I was saying would discourage foreign investors," Rodríguez recalled.

Rodríguez's counterparts abroad are concerned about Havana's future, too. In the United States, where businesspeople watch and wait for the day when the American embargo ends, architects, many of them Cuban born, are looking forward to the day when they can return and begin to plan the city.

Some of them are not waiting. Andrés Duany, the Miami-based architect celebrated for the traditional villages he has designed, like Seaside, Florida, and his brother Douglas, a landscape architect, visited Havana two years ago. Their goal was to devise building codes that would protect the city's eclectic old architecture and prevent Cuba from turning into a landscape of malls and Wal-Marts—another Miami. "If they convert Havana into Hialeah, it would be the greatest failure of all," Nicolás Quintana, a Cuban-born architect who left Havana in 1960 and has lived in Miami since 1986, told me. "The moment investments come from the outside, they will rip apart the urban fabric," Douglas Duany said. "This is a very poor country. It will do anything for dollars, and its codes are not geared to protect Havana against large-scale investment. People in Cuba are sick of leaky roofs, which is what they associate old architecture with." The Duanys are part of an increasingly large and vocal group of Miami architects and planners who are studying Havana in the hope of protecting it, in a sense, from the Cuban government, which they do not trust to treat the city with the care it deserves. Among the others are Quintana, who is helping to found a program in Cuban studies at the architecture school of Florida International University, and Raúl Rodríguez, a successful Cuban-born architect in Coral Gables who maintains close relations with a full range of architects and planners in Cuba, from Leal, the most powerful government official, to Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, who might be called the loyal opposition.

Unlike the political Cuban-Americans who united under Jorge Mas Canosa to pressure the American government to keep the economic embargo alive, the architectural lobby is not skittish about dealing with the present government of Cuba: it is much more realistic, is politically more centrist, and, in some cases, even left of center. There is an absurdist paradox underlying this effort: a group of American architects in a capitalist country, trying to persuade a Communist system that it has to be less indiscriminate in its embrace of the marketplace.

"In order to save this incredible architectural inventory from destruction, you need an infusion of capital that is impossible under the present system," Raúl Rodríguez said. "But too strong an infusion of unregulated capital will bring it down. Isn't it significant that it is those of us who live under a capitalist system who are now preaching abstinence?"

"I can't think of a single Miami firm that doesn't have an eye on Cuba right now," Michael Smith, who heads the operations of the Turner Construction Company in the southeast United States, says. "Castro won't be there forever, and we see a terrific opportunity."

The Castro government, in contrast to many regimes whose power is absolute, has shown almost no interest in architecture. It constructs relatively little and—what is stranger still for a Communist government—it ascribes little symbolic power to buildings. The government has not built great monuments to itself and it has not torn down the monuments built by its predecessors. It tends to adapt them instead. The Havana Hilton, finished just a year before Castro came to power, in 1959, was renamed the Habana Libre and for some time housed the revolutionary government's offices. A modern bank tower that was begun just before the Revolution was stopped in mid-construction, but, instead of being torn down as a capitalist symbol it was finished and turned into a hospital. Even the monument built to memorialize American lives lost in the explosion of the battleship Maine in Havana Harbor in 1898 remains, except that it has been shorn of the bronze eagle that once crowned its summit, because the Castro government considered the eagle too overt an American emblem. Fidel Castro works in a Mussolini-modern building that his predecessor, the dictator Fulgencio Batista, erected as the Palace of Justice. Castro changed its name to the Palace of the Revolution, and moved right in.

It isn't so surprising, then, that Havana's stunning range of architecture remains virtually intact, if in dire condition. For nearly four decades, the Cuban government has dealt with Havana by ignoring it. Improving living conditions in the provinces took priority over building in Havana, and the city was largely left alone, preserved by default.

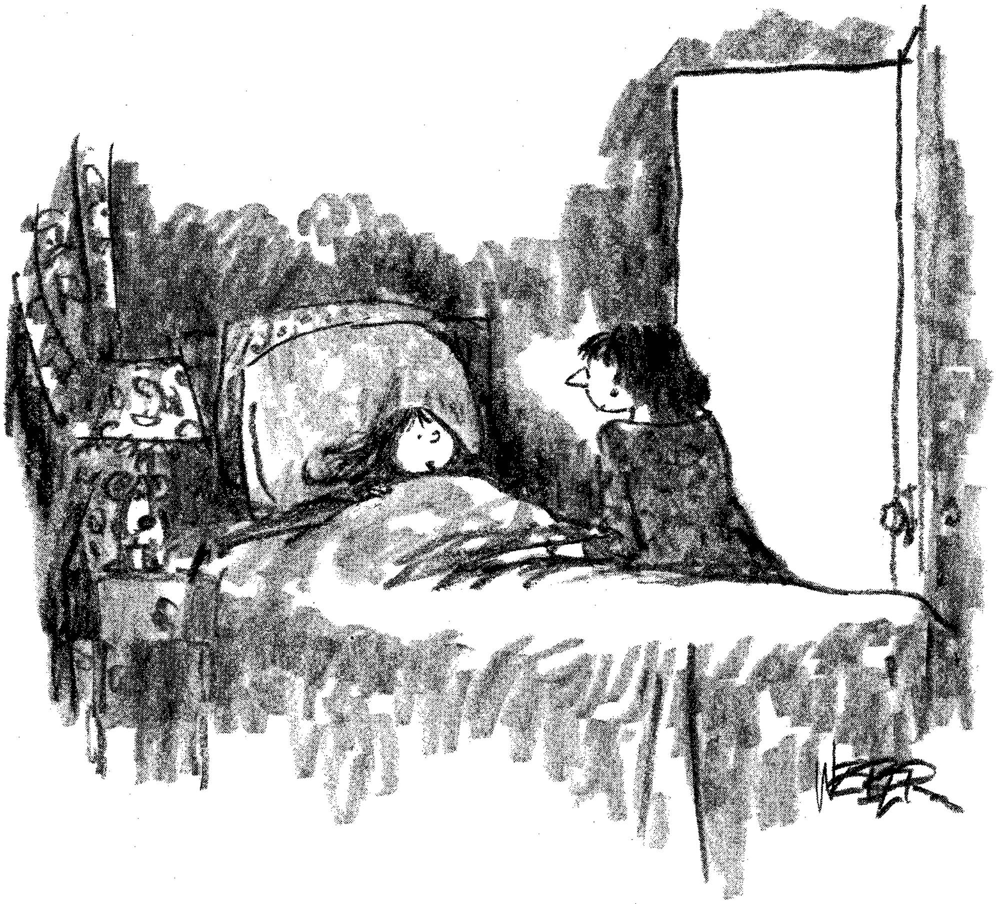
"Fidel hated Havana. He thought it represented the work of the bourgeoisie," Nicolás Quintana says. "He abandoned it, and now the city is going to pieces."

Havana nevertheless still looks less like a Caribbean city than like a European or a South American one—Barcelona, perhaps, or Buenos Aires. It is easy now to forget that when Cuba's élite began to flee Havana for Miami after Castro came to power they were leaving a city that was one of the world's most cosmopolitan, for what was, by comparison, a swampy backwater. In the thirty-nine years since then, Miami has been transformed into an international city, and Havana has all but stopped. It is wrong, however, to say that the city is frozen in time. Time is very visible in Havana; it just shows itself by decay.

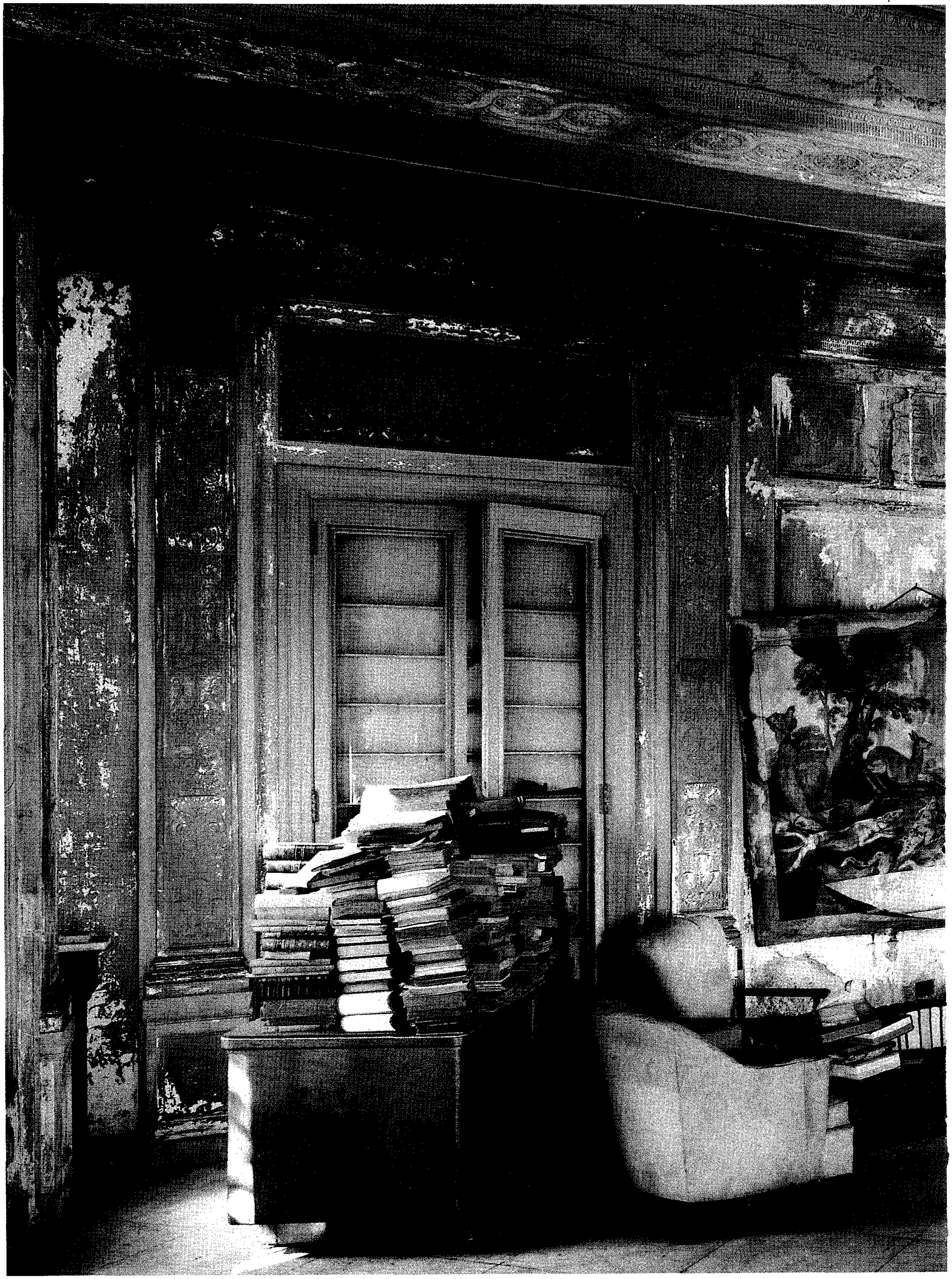
Havana possesses as varied a mixture of twentieth-century architecture as New York: there are Art Nouveau palaces to rival those of Barcelona, Art Deco houses to equal those of Paris, Spanish Colonial mansions in the style of Beverly Hills, and as much first-rate international-style modernism as in Berlin. Most of the grand residences had been occupied by sugar barons and industrialists who fled after the Revolution, and only a handful are in decent condition. Some, like an ornate house with a grand marble staircase a block away from my hotel, which was abandoned by a pharmaceuticals-maker, have become *ciudadelas*—literally, "little cities." That is, they are home to more than a dozen families. Laundry hangs from an elaborate stone-carved veranda, and one of the occupants of the house sells souvenirs from a cart amid weeds that were once a front lawn. Part communes and part squatter communities, *ciudadelas* have taken over some of the city's greatest houses. At the rate they are decaying, it is hard to imagine that many of them will still be standing ten years from now.

"It is a pity, to know that there is no possibility of saving this," Eduardo Luis Rodríguez says. "You can maybe save a hundred great buildings, but here there are a thousand of them."

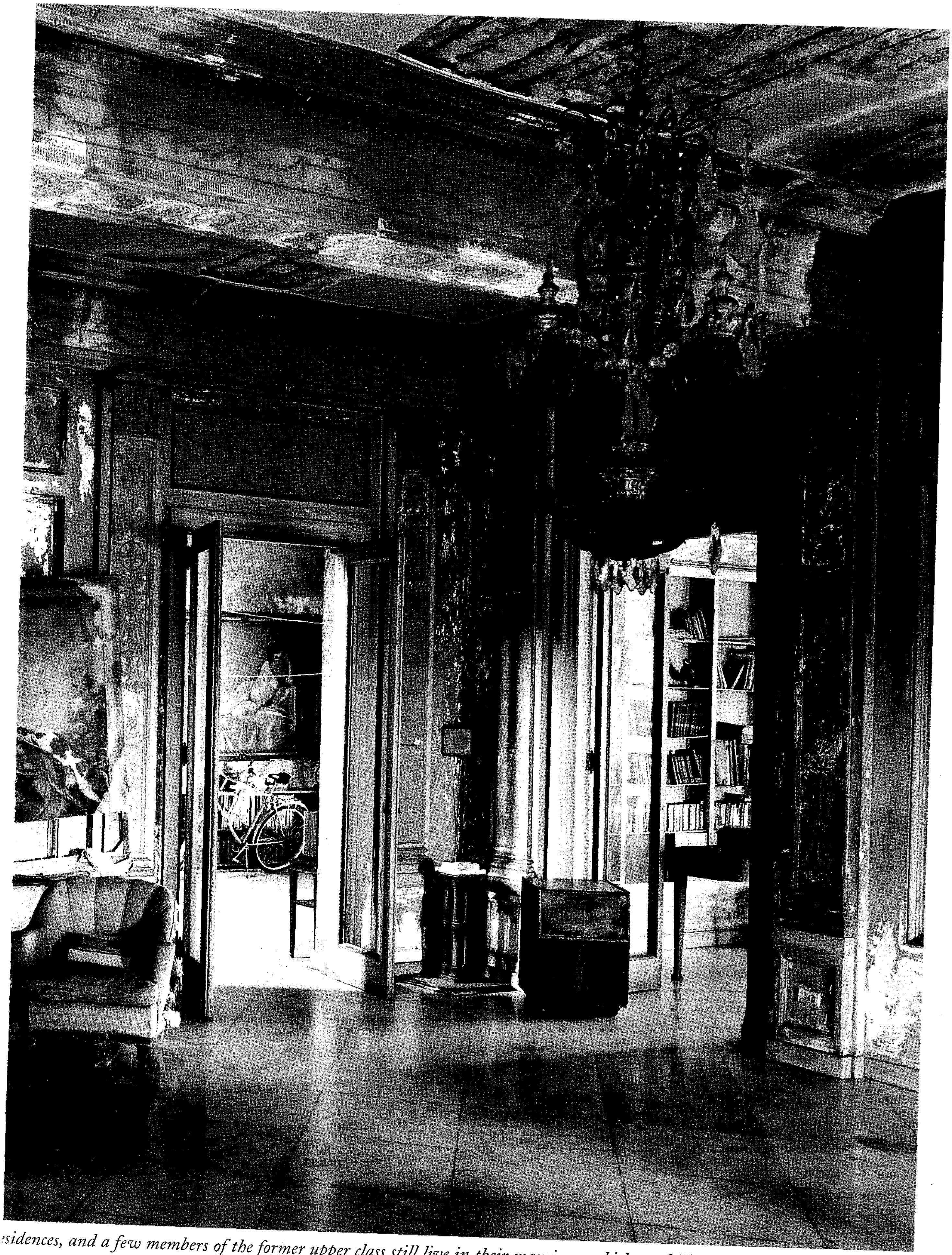
The streets of the suburbanized Vedado neighborhood are haunting. At night, they are completely dark—Cuba cannot afford many street lights—and much of the light within the houses is fluorescent, creating an eerie shrillness amid



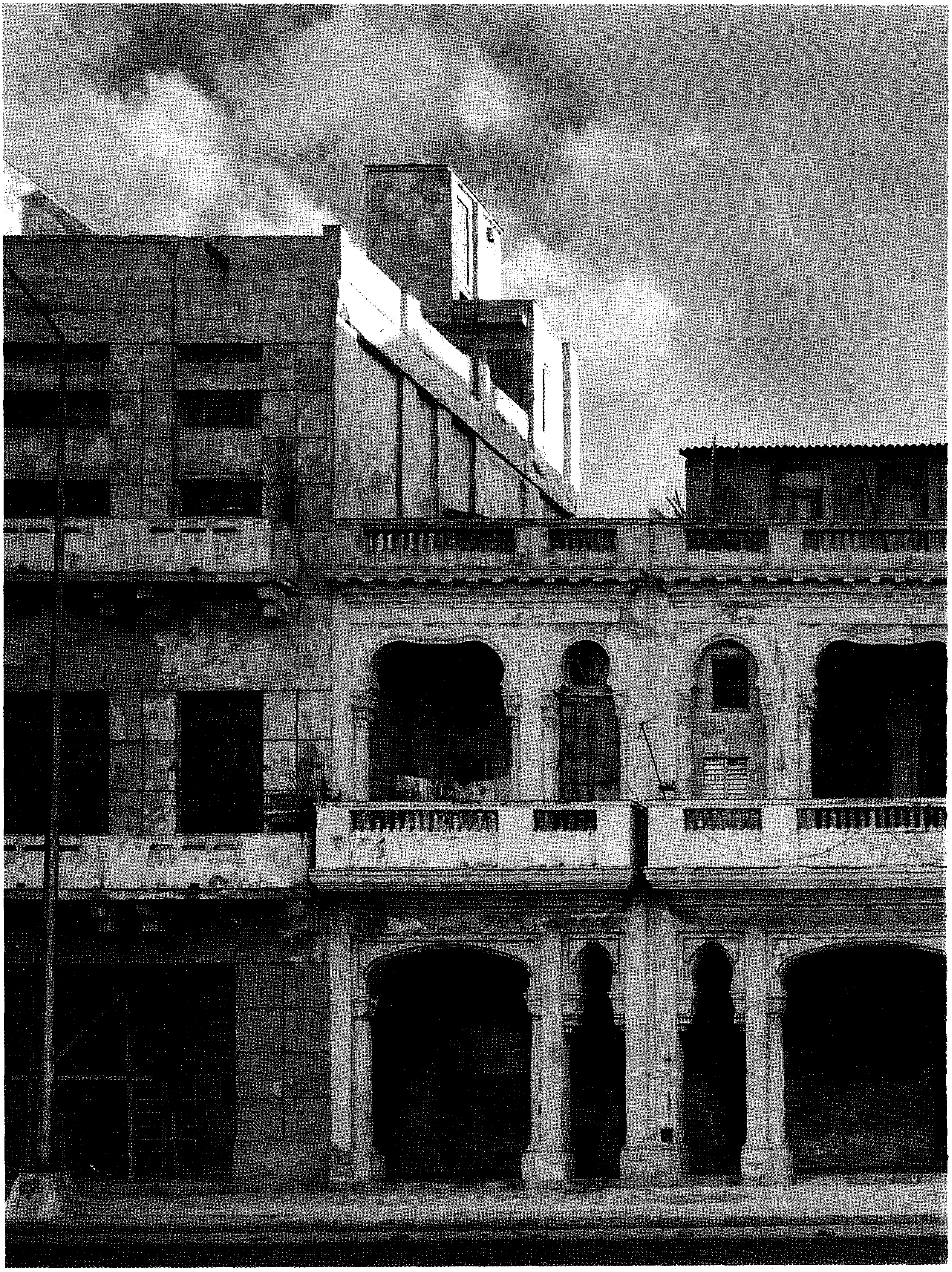
"How are you doing with that advertising copywriter?"



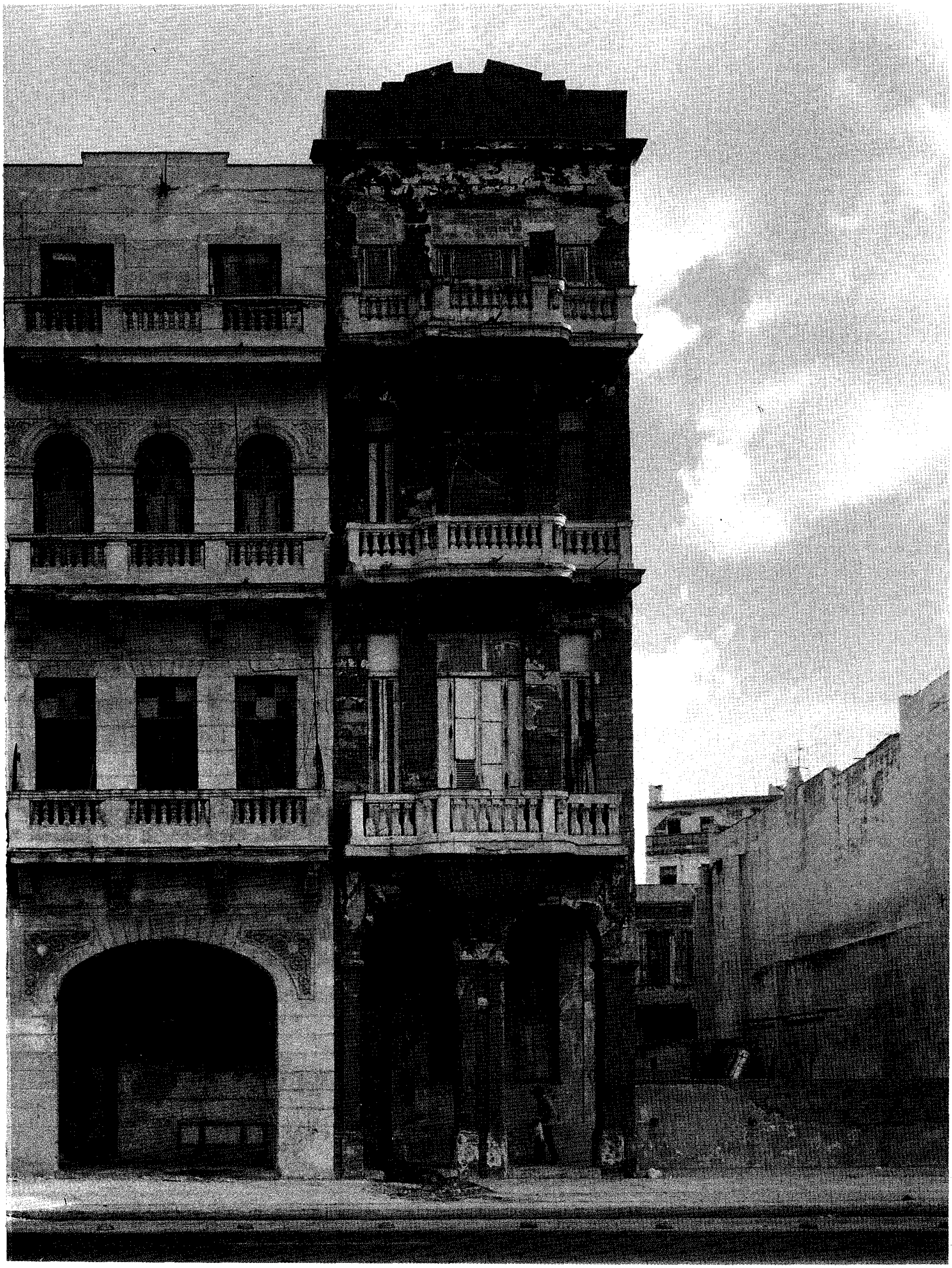
An abandoned room in the Faxas house. After the Revolution, Castro's government seized commercial assets, but not priv



sidences, and a few members of the former upper class still live in their mansions, which are falling apart around them.



Waterfront buildings on the Malecón, where plans for a high-rise hotel were recently proposed. "The moment investments come from t



tside, they will rip apart the urban fabric," a Cuban-American architect, who is trying to prevent Havana from becoming a strip-mall city, says.

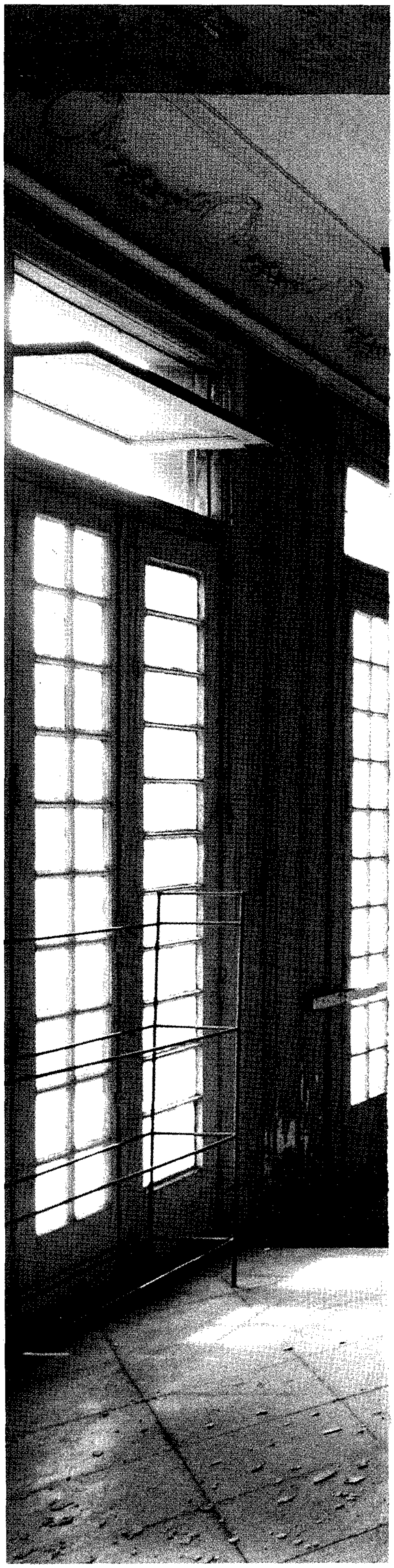
the soft features of the sculptured cornices and columns. This is aristocratic architecture taken over by another class, and while that is not in itself a process unique to Havana (it has also happened in Bedford-Stuyvesant and parts of Harlem), its impact here is staggering. These houses still possess a majestic presence, and the streetscape, though marred by empty lots and jangly new buildings put up in the fifties, continues to have a sense of coherence. It resembles the Garden District of New Orleans: there is the same mixture of great mansions, multiple dwellings, slight decay, and, here and there, well-tended preservation, all softened by lavish foliage. But nowhere in New Orleans is there a house like the stone mansion at the corner of Havana's Twenty-seventh and K Streets, where a broken-down 1958 Cadillac Fleetwood sits rusting in the front yard like a piece of sculpture, with families of cats and dogs turning its inside into an animal *ciudadela*, and where a woman watches over them from a balcony grand enough to review an Army battalion.

In the formerly posh neighborhood called Miramar, there is something even spookier: a sprawling stucco palace with a round turret, huge gables, and a roof of green tiles which has holes large enough to drop a breadbox through. What had been the glass on the front door is entirely broken, leaving only open ironwork between the outside and the marble vestibule. The place is so dilapidated that I assume it to have been entirely abandoned, but it turns out to be occupied by a Spanish-born woman named Luisa Faxas, who, with her mother, bought it in 1942 and has never left. After the Revolution, the Cuban government seized commercial assets but not residences, and a few members of the upper classes remained in them. Señora Faxas, a thin, chain-smoking woman of seventy-five who was dressed in pink pedal-pushers, has three children in the United States, but she refuses to leave the house to join them. The house has been badly damaged by water, with the exquisite plaster detail in the living room half destroyed, the master-bedroom ceiling crumbling, and most of the furniture gone.

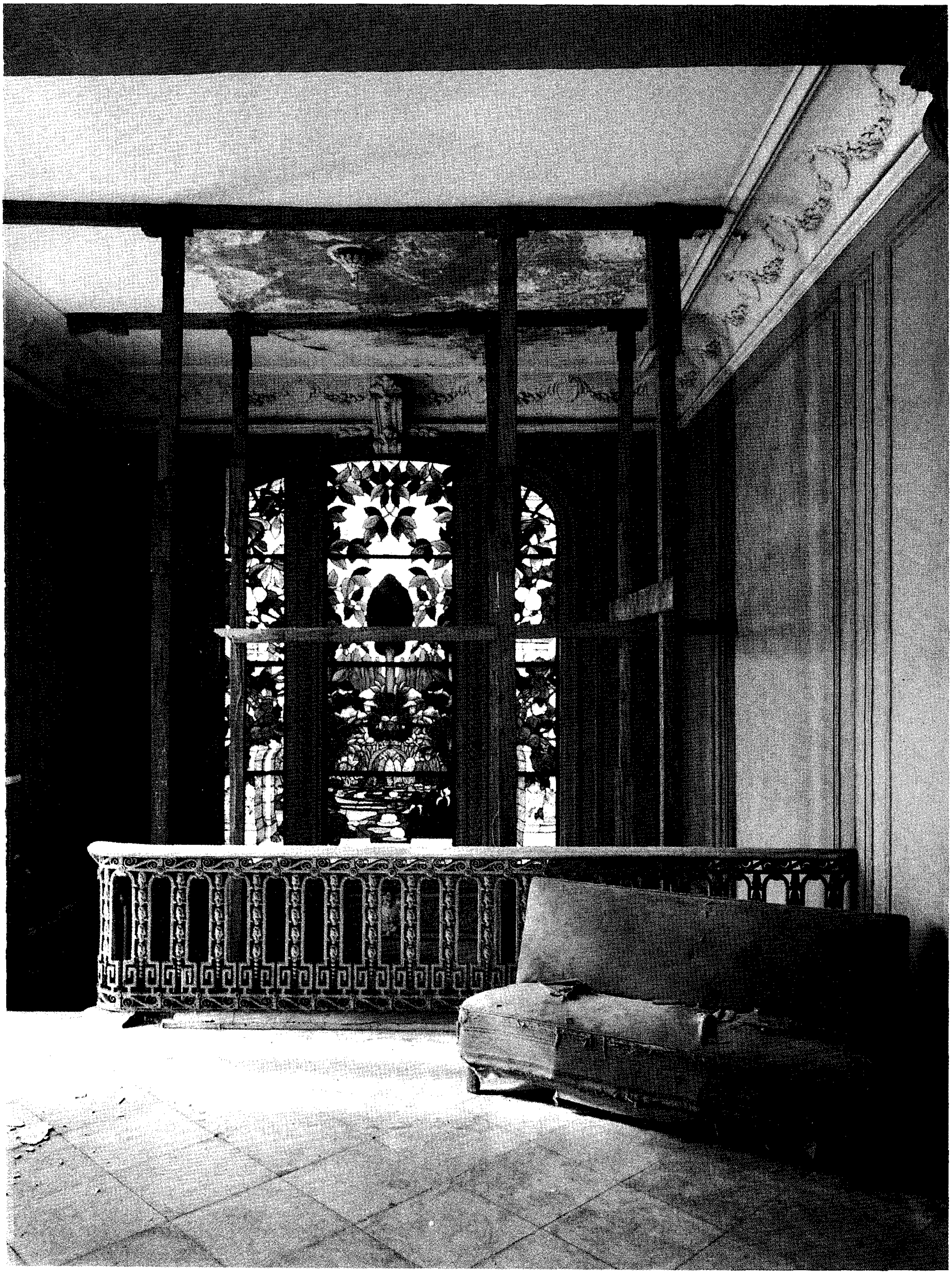
I imagined that Señora Faxas was so devoted to her sumptuous home that she remained, like a Cuban Miss Havisham, oblivious of the realities of the world around her and determined to hold on to her castle and protect it from a government that is more comfortable with the idea of twelve people living in one room than one person living in twelve rooms. I assumed she wanted only to die amid the remnants of the splendor she once loved. That turned out not to be true at all. "When I'm in another country, all I want to do is come back," she said, puffing on a cigarette and shooing away her dog. "But I don't love this house. I never did. The government keeps trying to persuade me to leave, so it can take the house, but all it keeps offering me is small apartments. And if the deal is not going to be fair, I stay here."

OVER Eduardo Luis Rodríguez's drafting table hangs a framed black-and-white photograph of a strange, voluptuous modern building. It turns out to be his private passion: the Castro government's first, and last, foray into serious architecture, a Cuban national arts institute built on the former golf course of the Havana Country Club, not far from Miramar. The country club, a place where Luisa Faxas might well have spent her afternoons playing tennis, was seized shortly after the Revolution by the government, which intended to convert it to a more populist use. The regime commissioned Ricardo Porro, a prominent Cuban architect, to design an extraordinary campus of Expressionist modern buildings, each one housing a different artistic discipline, and while not all the institute was built, the first stages, which included a fine-arts complex and a modern-dance complex by Porro and a ballet complex by Vittorio Garatti, were enough to establish the school as a project of stunning ambition.

And then, almost as quickly as the government commissioned the project, it withdrew its support. A set of buildings which brings to mind such architects as Eero Saarinen, Philip Johnson, José Luis Sert, and Louis Kahn, the school had an earnest, determined aestheticism that did not sit well with a regime increasingly influenced by the harsh Leninism of the Soviet Union. The college continues to operate, although its buildings have never been properly maintained. A huge, Soviet-style concrete bunker of a dormitory was put up in front of several of Porro's buildings, making a mockery of their careful relationship to the landscape, and the most beautiful section of all, Garatti's ballet school, was never even opened. Its monumental brick vaults, its long, serpentine brick gallery, and its extraordinary brick



A former mansion in Vedado. "Fidel hated Hava



thought it represented the work of the bourgeoisie," a Cuban-American architect says. "He abandoned it, and now the city is going to pieces."

dome are now virtual ruins, with the tropical jungle closing in on their lyrical, floating planes.

Ricardo Porro, after being cast aside by the revolution to which he had hoped to give an architectural identity, abandoned Cuba altogether, and now lives in Paris. His school, however, is a masterwork, and it has been more thoroughly rejected by the government than the grandiose classical buildings put up by Castro's predecessors. The current regime, it seems, cannot bear to accept its own parentage of an architectural treasure. I had never heard of the school until Eduardo Luis Rodríguez directed me to it, for it has been written out of architectural history as definitively as certain government figures who fall out of favor are written out of political history. Rodríguez knows it's unlikely that the buildings will ever be fully put back together, but he sees restoring the institute's good name as a duty. "For young architects, this school is the flag in our war to recover architecture," he says, walking across the former golf course. He insists that I see every nook and cranny of the school: swirling, sensual curving passageways; arcades that seem like a cross between Gaudí and Le Corbusier; and domed studios littered with broken glass. "Porro wanted to make a statement about disorder against order, tranquillity against tension," Rodríguez said. "This complex started as a symbol of what the Revolution could do in architecture, and then it became the opposite—a symbol of what the Revolution didn't want."

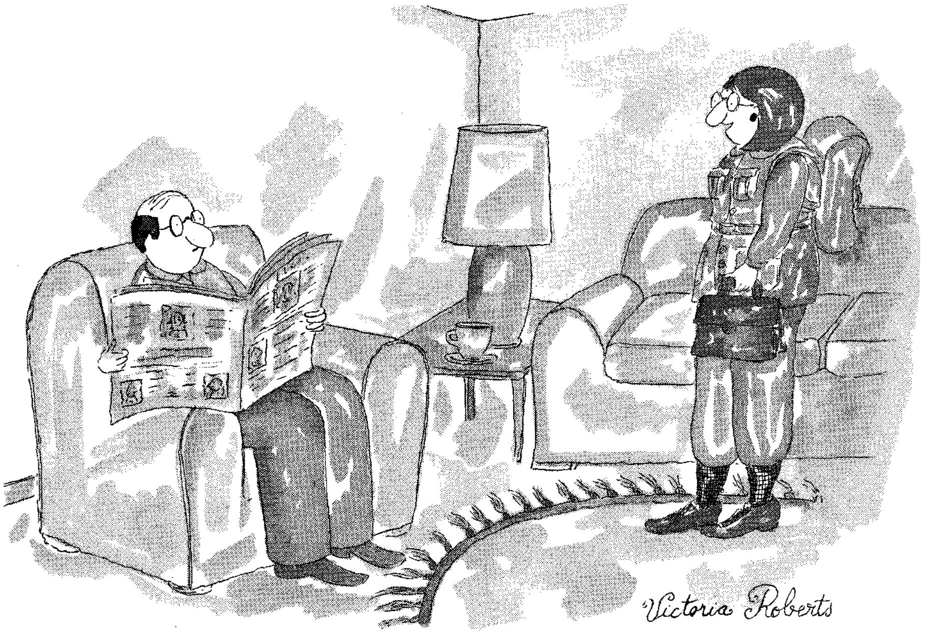
What the Revolution does want, apparently, is Eusebio Leal. A scholar and politician—he is a member of the National Assembly, and functions within the highest reaches of the Castro government—and a relentless, if subtle, self-promoter, Leal has awakened the government's interest in the city. Almost single-handed, he has revived Old Havana, the once-decaying colonial core near the waterfront, making it safe for tourists. Leal made restoration into a vehicle for development, just as it might be in an American city. The Old Havana he has made has a pristine, slightly too-perfect air about it: Old Havanaland. But the government knows that theme parks are profitable. So the new tourist route in Old Havana includes craft markets on the plaza in front of the cathedral; a church restored as a concert hall; and a Benetton boutique in the Plaza San Francisco. The tourist route doesn't include the main art museum, which has been closed since last summer for renovation, or the Granma, the boat in which Fidel Castro returned to Cuba in 1956, which has been displayed for years behind the old Presidential Palace in a glass enclosure that looks like an auto showroom. The boat is still there; it is just that it has been reduced to a kitschy curiosity, barely relevant to the new form of tourism, in which Old Havana feels every day more like Old San Juan.

Leal alone decides what will be restored in Old Havana. In addition to running the city agency that oversees old buildings and cultural facilities, he controls a state-owned company called Habaguanex, which develops and runs hotels, restaurants, shops, and offices in Old Havana, and another company, called Fénix, which is a real-estate-management company. You do not do business in Old Havana without running into Leal, whose mini-capitalist empire will bring in around forty-three million dollars this year, twenty-one million of which his agency plans on reinvesting in its projects. (The rest goes to the state.)

"Leal does whatever he wants, and no one can say no," a young architect in Havana says. "He treats Old Havana as his private fiefdom." But Leal has largely ignored the rest of the city, which is off the tourist route and crumbling fast. Leal, unlike many high officials of the Cuban government, is extremely visible: he has his own television show, and he can sometimes be seen on the streets of Old Havana, surveying his dominion. Early one evening, Eduardo Luis Rodríguez and I ran into him as we were heading toward the Plaza Vieja, the most active restoration site right now in Old Havana. A man of medium height with wavy steel-gray hair, Leal dresses in guayabera shirts. His manner is unfailingly courteous, but it is a courtesy that, like his traditional Cuban dress, is designed to create the illusion of accessibility. His demeanor is formal and cool, and he greets Rodríguez kindly but somewhat warily, with the tone of a person who is not accustomed to participating in conversations he cannot control.

Leal's restorations are stunning to look at, and they are technically superb: a staff of sophisticated, mostly young architects has remade such landmark hotels as the Ambos Mundos and the Santa Isabel with elegance and finesse. They consider their work to be important in holding back the onrush of sprawl development in Havana and in asserting the importance of traditional urbanism. Their goals, in this sense at least, are identical to those of the Miami architects' lobby. It is just that Leal's people draw the line at Old Havana; and the lobby (and Rodríguez) are far more concerned about the rest of the city.

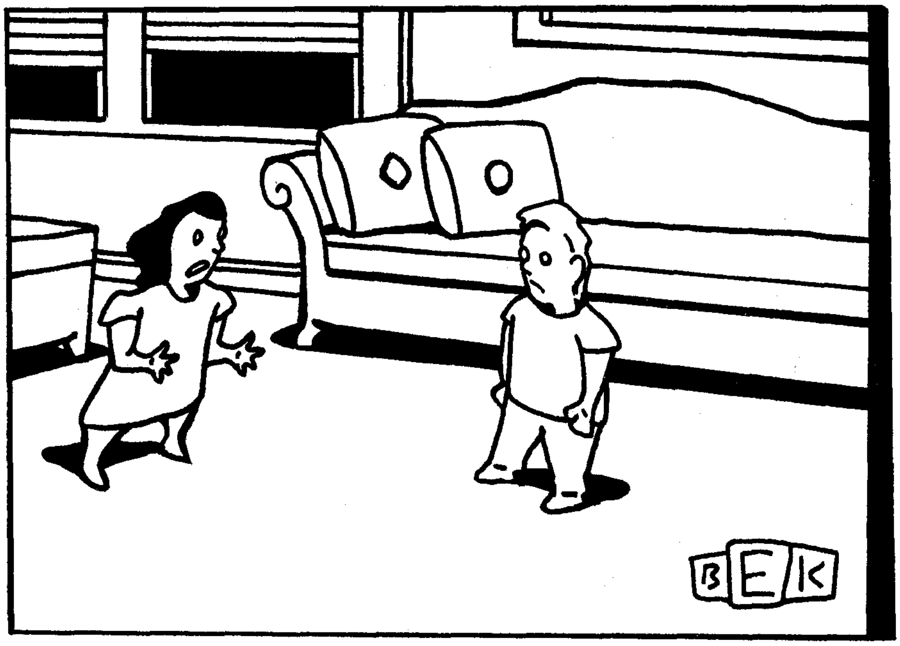
"I am against malls, and we give a lot of value to traditional neighborhoods. What we are doing is insuring that at least in Old Havana the wrong things will not happen," says Patricia Rodríguez, one of the architects in Leal's office. But these restorations, exquisite though many of them are, constitute a kind of Potemkin village: luxury hotels face picturesque



"I'm going to New Zealand for a walk."

squares, while a block or two away are deteriorating houses with entire families living in single rooms, often open to the street. Leal's office operates with so resolutely capitalist an attitude that it has produced an elegant forty-three-page book, much like a corporate annual report, that celebrates the achievements of its restoration projects. When Patricia Rodríguez hands me a copy at the end of our meeting and I express thanks she says that it will be fifteen dollars, please, in American currency. Leal has from time to time asked journalists for thousand-dollar contributions to his restoration funds in exchange for interviews.

"Eusebio Leal is a very compulsive person, and very forceful," Eduardo Luis Rodríguez told me, choosing his words with care. "He managed to convince people that the colonial buildings had value and should be restored. The problem was that he forgot about twentieth-century architecture." Colonial architecture is easy to like, not only because it is pretty, charming, and relatively unchallenging but also because it is ideologically safe. Putting money into fixing it up doesn't make the Castro regime nervous, since Old Havana was created neither by the capitalist sugar barons, who made the city's great mansions in the first three decades of this century, nor by the hated Batista regime, which made the city's early-modern buildings in the fifties. Colonial architecture was made by settlers who lived in the nineteenth century—long enough ago so that to the current regime they are quaint rather than threatening.



"Why did you speak to Dad? He can't green-light anything."

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IF Eusebio Leal is the New Age Cuban bureaucrat, turning capitalism to the benefit of socialism, and Eduardo Luis Rodríguez the independent scholar, pleading the case for the city as an artifact, Mario Coyula is something in between. An architect, scholar, planner, and urbanist who has been a central figure in the development of Havana since just after the Revolution, he has managed, more successfully than anyone, to operate on all sides of the table. He does not have anything like the power of Eusebio Leal, however, and seems increasingly to function as a philosopher on the city. He has close ties both to the international architectural community and to the Cuban government; he travels often in and out of Cuba discussing the development of Havana at academic conferences. He believes that the dangers of overdevelopment in Havana posed by the architects in Miami are exaggerated. But he nonetheless looks at Havana today with a certain amount of despair, because he feels that the country's economic problems will make it impossible for it to repair its older buildings, or to plan wisely for its future development.

Coyula is best known in Havana as the master of "the model"—a spectacular, sprawling miniature of the city, a hundred and sixteen metres square, which fills a two-story hall in his organization's Miramar offices. The main purpose of the model is to allow planners to evaluate the effects of new projects on the cityscape, and Coyula points with pride to the fact that a new high-rise hotel proposed for the Malecón, Havana's waterfront boulevard, was rejected after its insertion into the model suggested that it would have a far more deleterious effect on the skyline than the investors behind it had indicated.

The model is color-coded, with colonial buildings in red, twentieth-century buildings in beige, and brand-new or unbuilt ones in pure white. As soon as you see it you realize that Havana is primarily a twentieth-century city, that most of its growth occurred after the end of the Spanish occupation in 1898. A modernist by training, Coyula is exceptionally proud of the city's heritage of modernist architecture from the fifties.

Coyula is that oddest of creatures—a Communist élitist. "I remember before the Revolution people tended to show their best façades to the street—the façades of their buildings as well as of their characters," he says. "I despised that at the time, because I thought it was hypocritical. But at least it provided a friendly streetscape. Now the situation has been reversed, and people are not giving the proper value to good manners at all." Coyula is in a bind. He loves Havana, deeply and passionately ("thanks to my Havana, graceful and crumbling/waiting for this body, already fulfilled" are two lines of a poem he wrote as a dedication for his new book on the city), and yet he is, technically at least, part of a government that seems increasingly willing to allow large corporate enterprises from abroad to dictate the city's future form.

The dilemma for Havana is not just that there seem to be two alternative scenarios for its future—another south Florida, full of sprawl and high-rises, or more Leal-style restorations of historic buildings creating a kind of cordon sanitaire for the benefit of tourists—but that, in the end, the two are not really so different. They are both American models, and neither embraces the richness and the scope of the Havana that exists now. The question is whether Havana will be taken over by the world outside the theme-park gates or by the one inside it.

"For thirty-five years we haven't been thinking about money," Mario Coyula said. "But now we are learning very quickly." ♦

HAVANA JOURNAL

THE PLAGUE YEARS

An American writer was living with his family in Havana when the country nearly went off the rails, and people started heading for Miami on rafts and inner tubes.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

IN the spring of 1993, my wife and I moved with our three small children from a cottage in Oxfordshire to an apartment in the eastern Havana neighborhood of Miramar, which was where wealthy Cubans lived before the Revolution, and where many of Cuba's élite and most of the foreign diplomats reside now. Miramar has leafy parks and boulevards lined with flame trees and purple bougainvillea. Our seaside apartment was just five minutes up the road from the Russian Embassy building, which towered over everything else in sight like a glassy-eyed robot with amputated arms.

It was a strange time to be setting up residence in Cuba. The collapse of the Soviet Union had had a devastating effect on the island. Bereft of Moscow's subsidies and still suffering from the United States embargo, Cubans were faced with chronic shortages of everything: medicine, food, water, shelter, transportation, and electricity. There was a widespread feeling of impending doom. The so-called Storm of the Century had recently caused a "penetration" of the sea, and Havana had been flooded. This was followed by a bizarre epidemic of an illness known as "optic neuritis," possibly caused by vitamin deficiencies, that temporarily blinded its victims. The collapse of the social fabric was taking on apocalyptic dimensions.

A year earlier, I had begun work on a biography of Che Guevara. Che's widow, Aleida March, had agreed to coöperate with the project, and I had been assigned a Communist Party liaison: Jorge Enrique Mendoza, a voluble, rake-thin insomniac in his early sixties. Mendoza was the quintessential Fidelista. He had helped run Radio Rebelde in the Sierra Maestra during the Revolution, and had been the editor of the Party newspaper, *Granma*, for twenty years. He was now overseeing the Institute of History for the Central Committee's Ideology Department. I gleaned that one of his paramount tasks was to resurrect popular interest in Cuba's nineteenth-century independence hero, José Martí, and recast him as a homegrown "socialist," while official exaltation of the "foreigners" Marx, Engels, and Lenin was quietly downgraded.

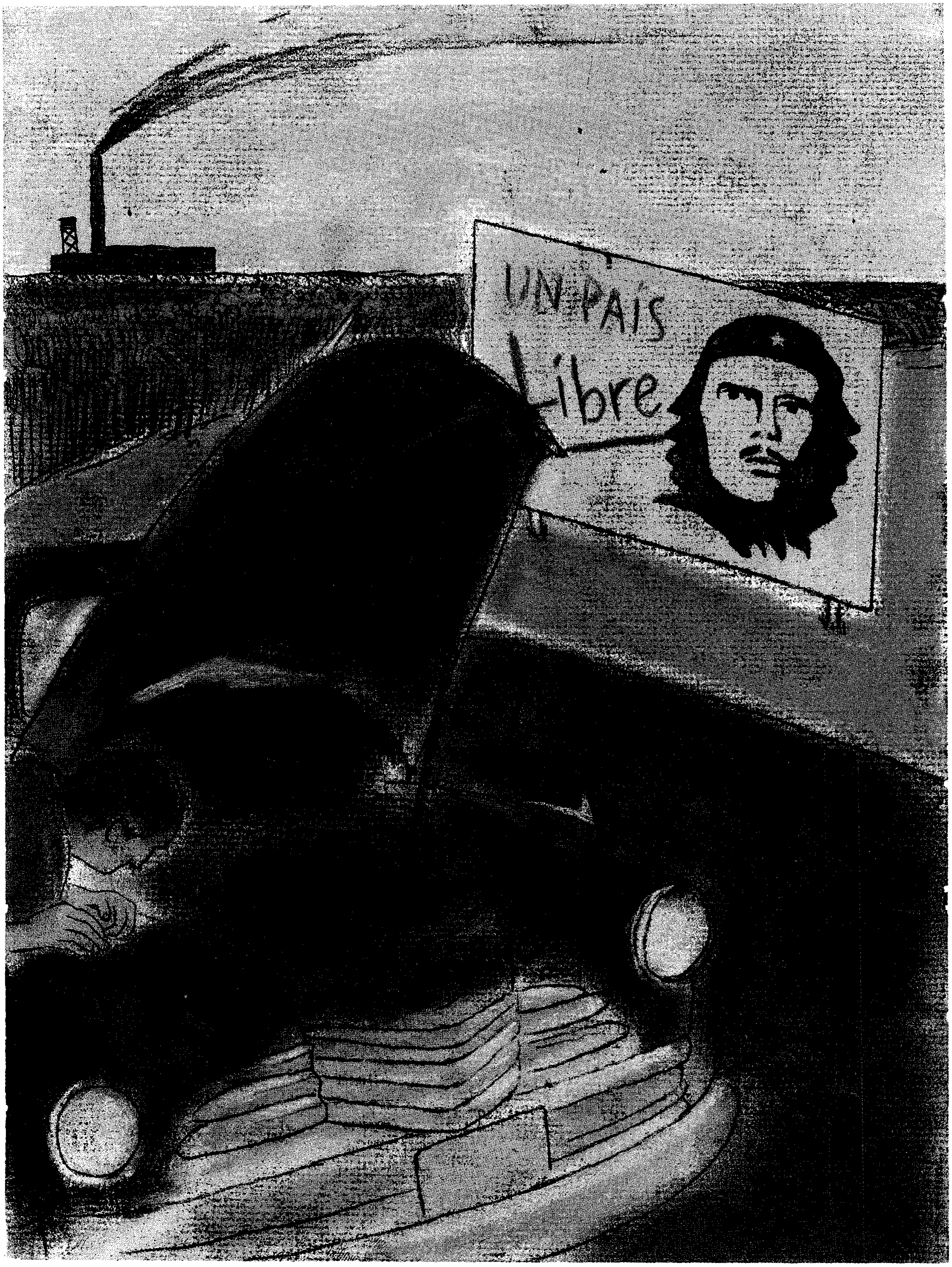
Mendoza was still full of revolutionary enthusiasm, but the more I explored Havana on my own the more I became struck by the schism between his view and what I saw around me. There was the gauntlet of whores lining the curbs of the road along the sea, and the insistent *jineteros*, hustlers, who sidled up to you whenever you took a walk, offering to buy illegal American dollars or sell cheap sex, or Cohiba cigars, or stolen boxes of the energy-enhancing drug PPG. My family and I were privileged, but even we were dogged by problems. My wife, Erica, and I decided to move from Miramar after our children—Bella, then five, Rosie, who was two and a half, and Máximo, nine months—became ill from drinking the water. Raw sewage had flooded the apartment.

A few months after we arrived in Havana, Mendoza attempted suicide. Aiming for his heart, he shot twice and missed both times. He was on a respirator for several months. No mention of any of this was ever made in *Granma*. Indeed, the whole episode was permanently concealed from the public, although it circulated widely as a news item on *la bola*, the rumor mill, which had it that the suicide attempt was probably caused by Mendoza's despair over the speech that Fidel had given on the revolutionary anniversary of July 26th. He had announced his first real concessions to capitalism. The U.S. dollar, already the de-facto currency of commerce, became legal tender, and foreign investment in Cuba's economy was to be encouraged.

After some time passed, I asked a high-level contact in the Central Committee if I could visit Mendoza, but I was told that it was "not appropriate." He lingered on alive but unseen in a special twilight world all his own, and soon the *bolas* about him ceased to circulate. Then, in February, 1994, Mendoza unexpectedly reappeared in public with Castro in a televised ceremony to mark the thirty-sixth anniversary of Radio Rebelde, and immediately afterward died of a heart attack. By that summer, Cuba's new social contradictions and the state's continued inability to provide the basics had created an extremely volatile atmosphere, which came to a head with riots in Havana and an ensuing exodus of rafts. More than thirty thousand Cubans took to the sea, trying to reach Miami.

It was a period of dramatic and often bewildering change for Cubans, and I realized that my presence in Havana had become a source of discomfort to some officials. Through *la bola*, I discovered that some of my new friends had been assigned to monitor my activities and assess my thoughts. A lot of this was probably due to Mendoza's absence from the scene as my official minder. To help clear the air, I hired Sofía Gato as our housekeeper. She was a black woman who had been the nanny of the Guevara children and had married one of Che's bodyguards. She helped us move to our new house in the former Soviet residential enclave of Náutico. I hoped that with Sofía living with us the official suspicions would subside, since I assumed that if I ever

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDEL RODRIGUEZ


UN PAÍS
Libre

gave her doubts she would report them.

One of the paradoxes of life in Cuba was that people like Sofía actually did become close friends, but the feeling of being under constant scrutiny gave me a claustrophobic sensation that affected the way I spoke, the diary I kept, and even my letters to friends outside Cuba, including my agent in New York, Deborah Schneider. (The excerpts that follow have been edited for clarity.) I sometimes felt like a character in Camus's "The Plague," living in a quarantined city, sealed off from the outside world. If there was a common thread linking the lives of the people we knew, it was the daily struggle to reconcile their beliefs and hopes with their private needs. Everyone was dealing with a festering and unresolved moral crisis.

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Sunday, May 22, 1993

Dear Deborah:

Hello from Havana. Things are good. I have obtained a temporary residency carnet, giving me leave to stay in Cuba—and come and go—until the end of 1994. Except for a few compatriots who've been here many years, and whose politics make this possible, I am the only such American here.

I have found us a three-bedroom apartment in Miramar, a residential neighborhood near the center of Havana, right on the seashore. This isn't as coveted as it sounds, since in March a giant wave devastated much of the coastline, and the building we are in (on the top floor) is still surrounded by rubble and debris. Stray dogs use the front door to pee on.

I have a car, a Russian Lada, which usually runs and when it does is indispensable. Last night, however, thieves stole three of its four wheels. At least I also have a bike—a big, heavy Chinese "Flying Pigeon." Little Rosie's already broken her heel in its spokes; after a half-dozen trips to an orthopedist she's in a cast and will be fine. Máximo at four months is big and healthy and already has two teeth; Bella's going to kindergarten and quickly picking up useful Spanish words like *estúpido* (she's now four and a half). Erica is taking all of this in with stoicism, and says she likes it here. . . .

Looking forward to hearing from you soon, Jon

June 30, 1993: "The Thought of Che Guevara and the Challenges of the End of the Century" was the title of a symposium at Matanzas University, a technical college with a fully functioning Marxism faculty. It overlooks the sweeping bay and is next to a militia firing range, so that in the beautiful evenings the stillness is punctuated by rifle and automatic-weapons fire. A group of Guevarist intellectuals gathered for three days to talk and listen, while the hill's tarantulas stalked them like some kind of hairy wraiths. Tarantulas came up to tables on the terrace in the evening, and greeted guests at their room doors. They were stomped on and killed, and their bodies littered the cement walkways of the little campus hotel for the duration of the conference.

July 18th: Our balcony is a front-row seat in an open-air theatre. Every day at sunrise, a group of elderly Cubans in faded clothes marches down to the sea, and, fanning out in a geometric pattern, they do calisthenic exercises before plunging into the water. Then, just as inexplicably, they leave again. One day recently I awoke to the sound of waves crashing and went outside. There on the pitted gold blanket of the dog's-tooth rock at the sea's edge were two people dressed entirely in white, wearing turbans. They picked up shells and threw other objects into the raging surf. It was an initiation ritual of Santería, the Afro-Cuban religion that, bizarrely, carries on unhindered in Cuba. Each evening at dusk, a man in a wheelchair is pushed down to the water's edge by a friend. There, as the sun sinks into the ocean and the night fills the sky, the invalid sings spine-tingling arias into the nocturnal void. At about the same time of day, a Cuban naval gunboat usually appears, cutting a rapid swath across the horizon as it patrols the coast. I have begun to think of the country as a surreal blend of official coercion and stubborn individualism. Much like the sea that extends to the world beyond while hemming the island in, its atmosphere is both lyrical and melancholic, liberating and imprisoning at the same time.

August 4th: In the late afternoon in José Martí Park the voices of black men rise in billows, apparently angry, audible even from the balconies overlooking the square. Every afternoon these men gather there, in the shade around a particular stone bench, to argue about baseball. In the same park, military cadets and their brides, dressed in white, arrive in buses for collective weddings, to pay homage to Martí. They walk to the white marble plinth to lay a wreath, then proceed gracefully back to their bus. Colleagues blow trumpets.

Habaneros tell you about the time drunken American Marines climbed on Martí's statue and pissed on it; they seem indignant even now at the arbitrary affront, as if such an act were an example of just how degraded Cuba's dignity had become in the years before the Revolution. Martí is to Cubans what Gandhi is in modern-day India: a historical touchstone whose visage is everywhere. His declamatory catchphrases are signboarded by the regime to establish a kinship between his nationalistic patrimony and that of the institutionalized Revolution.

In Vedado, there is a corner lot overgrown with weeds and some tropical vegetation, and an exposed wall of coral rock. The whole thing is strangely caged in by wrought iron. Here, preserved for all to see, is the spot where Martí, as a prisoner of the Spanish, was forced to break rocks as a common prisoner.

Cubans speak proudly about the "syncretism" of Afro-Cuban culture, but the label also applies to Fidel's institutionalized socialist revolution. It, too, is syncretic. It has learned to be in order to maintain power and to reach the increasingly apathetic new generation of Cubans. "Fidelismo" has pragmatically incorporated Christianity (e.g., the best-selling book "Fidel and Religion") and Martí's nationalist mantle, with its attendant religiosity (Martí is "the Apostle"). And by merely pointing to the threatening, bullying United States, the regime has mostly managed to contain the restlessness of Cuba's increasingly youthful population by providing an external focus for dissent. As a reinforcement, it has also coöpted—if mostly in exhortatory fashion—the legacy of Che Guevara, the ultimate icon of youthful rebelliousness.

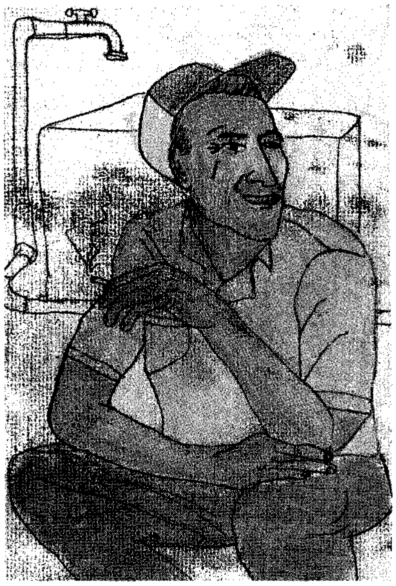
Nationalism, anti-Americanism, Communism, and Third Worldism have all shared the stage with Fidel, who is Cuba's *babalawo* [witch doctor], willing his people yet again to acquiesce as he does his next fetish dance from behind an ever-changing series of masks.

OCTOBER 10TH: I saw Fidel's daughter Alina Fernández, the former model, today at the Diplomercado, the dollars-only supermarket for foreigners and Cuba's nomenclatura. She was wearing a scarf over her hennaed hair, and a long kind of artist's tunic. Seeing the nervousness of her heavily made-up, gaunt face, the excessive, anorexic thinness of her frame, I had already tagged her as breakdown material before my companion, Micaela, nudged me and whispered, "Do you know who that is?"

DECEMBER 22ND (in Miami, en route back to Havana after a five-week trip to Moscow, London, and the U.S.): The big news here is that Alina Fernández has finally defected. She flew into the U.S. via Spain. Apparently she went out on a false passport, and in disguise, but there are no more details than that.

DECEMBER 23RD: Micaela came by today and gave me the dope on Alina's defection, reminding me of the time we'd run into her at the Diplomercado . . . She asked if I remembered the ten-gallon can of chocolate ice cream Alina was buying. Micaela couldn't figure it out at the time, because Alina was always careful about what she ate. Apparently she went on a special fattening-up diet and gained a lot of weight—and put on a wig—to fool the airport security when she left.

DECEMBER 25TH: Gave the kids their Xmas this morning. Bella was hopping around like a jackrabbit, ecstatic and happy. Later, brought Mercedes [a neighbor, not her real name, who had worked for the Cuban counter-intelligence agency] over for lunch, and was treated to a weird and venomous outpouring about virtually everyone we know, the ultimate purpose of which seemed to be to make me insecure and suspicious about people's motivations and sincerity, indeed the validity of my entire project.



Later, I got an earful from Sofía about Mercedes and how she could do me "no good." In what seemed to be a related thought, she also let drop that the state security agency used to call her and tell her whether she could or couldn't attend certain functions where foreigners would be present; sometimes they even "recommended" she go. With me, she claims, she's as yet received no call.

NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1993: Took Erica and the brood out for errands and then to the lunchtime café at 70th Diplomercado. Who should we meet but Carlos Carrasco, just in from London. He informed us that the Cubans have refused to let him be here on a journalist's visa this time, which means he can't work on getting the BBC permissions for the "Communism" series they are planning. Because of his new hat as a consultant for Anita Roddick's Body Shop, he has been given a business visa. So he's pressing ahead with that, and it looks as though by next spring there will be kiosks selling Body Shop stuff. Wow. . . . Carlos also thinks the opposition to the TV series he was mooting is related to a shutdown taking place at all Party levels regarding the Cuba-Soviet relationship—because no firm signals have come from Fidel in terms of how they should deal with that era.

In the evening, I went to visit friends, and when I got home Erica and the kids were ensconced in the bedroom watching the pirated satellite channels we're now getting from the U.S. This afternoon a pair of Cuba's new entrepreneur class (moonlighting electronics engineers) installed a dish on the roof. We have a cartoon channel, the sports one, CNN, a couple of movie channels, and so forth—a lot of it junk, but if it'll help ease the strains of living here, especially for Erica, then it'll have been worth the one hundred and twenty dollars it cost.

JANUARY, 1994: Old Mederos, the house-painter and Party militant, is back in our house painting the walls for me, only three months after we moved in. Already they had begun to bear the surface geography of our children: a dirty handprint here, a heelprint there—a phantasmagoria of infantile family history, a wall map of our brief residence.

I could have lived a little longer with the walls as they were, but week before last he visited me and told me that they were eating only boiled cabbage and vinegar at home. His two good-for-nothing sons have been laid off from their jobs, and his large black wife, Silvia, has begun to excoriate him for his insufficiency as a breadwinner.

Sofía despises Mederos for being old and sly and always arriving, as if by instinct, right around lunchtime. She silently refuses to do a thing for him, so usually I have to whisper to Erica to fix the old boy a sandwich, take him some water, a cup of coffee, and at the end of the day a swig of rum. It's true that he's a terrible painter: he spills paint everywhere, and leaves brush bristles, dust, and dirt embedded in the walls. It isn't, I've come to realize, so much that he's sloppy as that he is simply old. And the paint he brings is bad: just quicklime mixed with kerosene.

I can't bring myself, despite all this, to tell him to stop. I like his presence, his munchy toothless face and his pride. Usually once a week or so he will tell me about his undying fealty to the Party; but he is seventy now and his family is hungry, and his wife is increasingly truculent. She was once a good cook, and before the Soviets pulled the rug out they would buy a pig and have parties with real Cuban rum about every two months, back when his pension was worth something and there were things to buy with it. But now she feels useless and frustrated.

He is the head of the Committee to Defend the Revolution in his apartment building. It used to be that this position gave him some respect. There would be an audience of sixty-five people at the weekly committee meetings. Now he is lucky to have six or seven people show up. And these are mostly friends who come to help him save face and avoid ridicule. The Party has told its militants that the lack of food is going to continue, and become worse, but that the plan is to reactivate the stalled industrial production of goods by year's end, after the new supplies of Colombian oil that have been arranged begin arriving this summer. Just how this will be achieved in time to fill empty bellies and pacify despondent minds they aren't told.

At its last meeting, the committee discussed its obligation to keep an eye on all Party members receiving money or food from relatives abroad. The purpose of this vigilance is to curb "excesses of ostentation." In other words, it now is legal for people to have dollars, and to receive money from abroad, but they should not flaunt their good luck. This is to prevent the resentment of hungry neighbors who do not receive such consignments.

JANUARY 8TH: Tonight I got inspired and actually wrote the first page of my book. It occurred to me to dig out Che's birth certificate, which someone had given me a copy of, and there I found my beginning, in the form of a description of the ceremony in the Rosario notary's office which entered Ernesto's name into legal records the day after his birth. I'm off and running. . . . From now on I must try and write every day, if only half a page.

MARCH 10TH: Aleida was quite concerned that I understand that Che's relationship with Tita Infante [a friend of his from university days] was "platonic" and she mentioned another woman whose name she couldn't remember in Argentina who had also been quite *enamorada* of Che. I remarked that "machismo-Leninismo" seemed to have been a feature of the Revolution. Aleida recalled that at the Triumph the women were "throwing themselves" at the *barbudos* [the bearded ones, as the rebels were called], who had been in the Sierra for more than two years, where rules regarding sex had been austere. As for what went on at La Cabaña [the fortress that Che commanded after the victory], she said, Well—with a big smile as if to indicate it was quite a scene—there had been a lot of "lovemaking" going on. And Che had had plenty of opportunities, but "I was at his side."

Aleida let slip in an oblique way that I have people on my tail. Without naming the person, she mentioned that someone had called her and asked her why she was coöperating with me. She said she told him, as if in riposte, that it was "true she had duties, but she also had her rights" to coöperate with whomever she wanted. I asked her if she thought I should worry. She said no, that she'd check into it, but that I needed to work fast and see really important people, not waste my time with less important figures.

APRIL 16TH: Back home after an eighteen-day trip to Miami, New York, and Washington. The ambience here is edgy, with increasing blackouts and a certain amount of curious expectation about the upcoming meeting with Miami exiles, scheduled for next weekend, and *bolas* about unrest in different districts, ranging from Playas del Este to Marianao. Worse, from my point of view, is the sense that the street is getting more violent. The day before I left on my trip, we all witnessed a brutal beating on the vacant lot out front, with one guy hitting another repeatedly in the head with his fist and then an exhaust pipe. When I returned, my neighbors told me they heard that the victim subsequently died. The day of my return, a man stabbed his wife in front of our house because he found her sitting on another man's motorbike.

MAY 4TH: Weekend before last was "La Nación y Migración" conference with the Miami Cubans and other exiles at the Palacio de Convenciones. I'm told that it's significant as the first step toward hoisting in more money from the Miami crowd and perhaps getting them to form a new lobby to influence White House opinion on the issue of the blockade. Beginning some days before the conference, a rumor began—first reported on Miami TV—that Fidel had had a stroke, or a cerebral hemorrhage, or something. It was then confounded by his shaking the hand of each of the two-hundred-odd conferencees, and by his meeting with the Zambian President, who came last week. But the *bola* persists because Fidel has been unusually out of the public eye of late, and people read all sorts of significance into this. There are even reports that there was an attempt on his life.

Last Saturday was a gray, rainy day, and Mariano Rodríguez Herrera, a writer I met recently, came by for lunch. We spent several hours talking and drinking beer. I offered to take him home, and put his bike in the trunk of the car. He lives on one of the seedier side streets of Miramar. The day before, he had recouped his house from the relatives of his sixth and last wife, who were installed while he was away on a trip and before the wife pissed off to Mexico. The relatives erected a wall and left him with a small bedroom and bathroom at the rear. After a two-year battle, he'd managed to get rid of them. They'd left taking even the light sockets with them. So he was feeling celebratory.

Anyway, I then drove home, and as I was coming along Fifth Avenue a woman darted out into my path on her bicycle, and stopped. I reacted by reflex, hitting the brakes and then skidding, because the road was wet, and turning to the right to avoid her at the same time. I remember as if in photographic snapshots that first I saw that I was probably going to hit her legs, then, somehow, I was free of her and skidded to a halt, pointing sidewise. I jumped out, and she was slipping off down a side street without a backward glance. Nor did she look back when I yelled "*Está loca*?" or something like that. A truck and several cars had stopped, and the truck driver said that moments earlier the woman had tried to do the same thing to him, further down the avenue, and that he'd nearly crashed. He said she was crying, and that she seemed to be trying to kill herself.

I drove home really shaken, and it wasn't until I told Erica what had happened that the memory of the woman's face came back to me, and I realized we had actually locked gazes for an instant, and that, indeed, she had waited and "chosen" my car to leap in front of. I remember she was plump, wore dark clothes, had long dark hair and a moon face, was between thirty and forty years old, and that there was something dead in her eyes—no expression whatsoever.

MAY 10TH: The kids are fine, except for an impetigo epidemic that has them all looking like little sailors with scurvy. But they're veterans now. Amoebas, worms, parasites—you name it, they've had it.

The latest bedtime routine is that we eat while Sofía takes the kids up and rocks and sings each one to sleep. Sofía tells us that Bella's favorite lullaby is the July 26th Movement's anthem. Bella's getting a unique education here. In her primer at the Eliseo Reyes school—where she's the only foreign child—"f" stands for *fusil* [rifle], and "t" for *tanque* [tank, the military kind]. There are colorful little pictures of these weapons to aid her learning process.

AUGUST 4TH: Yesterday another of the Old Havana-Regla ferries was hijacked. It is not known yet whether they made it to Miami. The rumor is that it was chased, but people on the Malecón began yelling and throwing bottles, and the chasers stopped. This follows the hijacking at gunpoint of another ferry last week. It was finally intercepted in international waters by an American Coast Guard vessel, which offered passage to all those who wanted to go to Miami. Apparently fifteen of the thirty-one people did go. There is *creciente malestar* [growing uneasiness] here. Beginning on July 26th, and coinciding with increasingly tough language and extraordinary appearances by Raúl, also Fidel, more launches began being hijacked from the port of Havana in broad daylight.

AUGUST 20TH: Today I went downstairs for coffee and Rodolfo [a next-door neighbor] called over the wall to tell me that if I wanted to see some *balseros* [people who were leaving on rafts] I should go down to the seashore. I did, and we saw four men rowing out from the mouth of the Quibú River in a rubber dinghy, all wearing what looked like red life jackets, with a woman on an attached inner tube rowing behind. The sea was calm, blue, like a plate, as they say here, and you could see the silver traces of current making arcing patterns on the surface. As they made their way out, a small Coast Guard cutter advanced toward the raft. When it got closer it turned around and sped in the opposite direction. The raft steadily, slowly made its way toward Florida.

When I got home I found an ashen-looking Fernando B. there. His son Ernesto had taken off yesterday afternoon at 3 P.M. on a windsurfer. They needed to use the phone to call friends in the U.S. and ask them to contact the American Coast Guard and find out if he had made it or was picked up. Fernando was in shock. At one point he couldn't remember his own telephone number. I tried to lift his spirits, telling him that Ernesto probably didn't have to go far, since there are many boats out just beyond the twelve-mile limit, and that yesterday there was a good wind.

This afternoon I could hear sounds coming from my neighbor's garden. He was repairing the blue fibreglass boat that has sat untended the entire time we've been here. Boats like his are now fetching up to five thousand dollars. Inner tubes went up to three hundred dollars in the last week. Whether my neighbor is planning to sell the boat or leave himself I don't know.

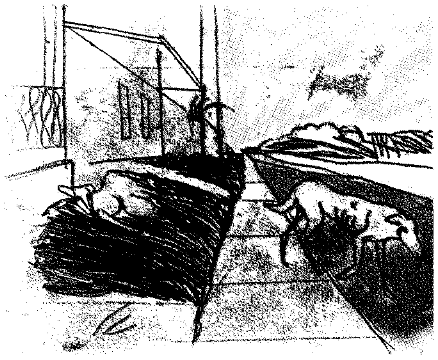
AUGUST 22ND: Drove back home from the beach via Cojímar, Hemingway's old port. After hearing so much about the crowds rafting off from there in recent days, I wanted to see for myself. It is a sleepy, old-fashioned turn-of-the-century town. There is a little cove, and a park with shade trees, and a colonial stone fort. In front of the fort is a pergola shading a bust of Papa Hemingway—smiling, virile, in his forties. A little further on there were several hundred people just hanging around at the water's edge in the sun by a small inlet where boats could beach with ease. Clearly, they were waiting to go. There was a muted air of expectancy.

La bola has it that three thousand people left over the weekend. Many rafts were found empty. People's limbs were floating in the water. I talked to Erica this morning about what we should do. The best thing seems to sit tight and keep writing and meanwhile have funds ready for an emergency leave.

Fernando showed up, joyous and thankful, with the news that Ernesto is safe. He reached Key West in nineteen hours. Apparently he passed boats but refused their offers of help. Everything was done on the spur of the moment. He was on the sea and realized that the winds were right and he just went.

AUGUST 10, 1995: Well, here I am, alone—with Sofía—in this house which suddenly feels big and empty; the rain outside beats down in an afternoon tropical downpour, the sun still shining. Erica and the kids left last night.

Their departure was typically Cuban: Manuel ran around with the car all yesterday trying to find out why it wouldn't start and finally returned it to me, having taken it to Gilberto and gotten it "fixed," but as we prepared to leave for the airport it wouldn't start. We got it push-started and made it. To leave the airport we had to do it again, and to get it into the garage, again.



Night before last we threw a going-away party for Erica and the kids. In all about forty people must've passed through, although some of the neighbors were too sad to come. We consumed five bottles of rum and two cases of beer, plus a great *ensalada* and lobster *bocaditos* [sandwiches] prepared by Sofía.

Yesterday Erica went next door to say

goodbye to Ana and Isaac. Ana broke down, Isaac looked quite overcome, and Erica came away streaming with tears. It was the first time she'd cried, and she was quiet, a bit sad, all the way to the airport. There the spell was broken a bit by the kids going up and down the escalator, and Max, when he saw the planes, jumping up and down in his shorts and boots (no shirt), excitedly saying, "*Vamos al avión!*"

September 4, 1995

DEAR DEBORAH:

Hope your summer has gone well. Mine has been one of change, of limbo, work and expectation. Erica and the kids have already gone ahead to Oxford to give me time to finish work and pack up. They're busy teaching Cuban cusswords to the tender children of the sceptred isle.

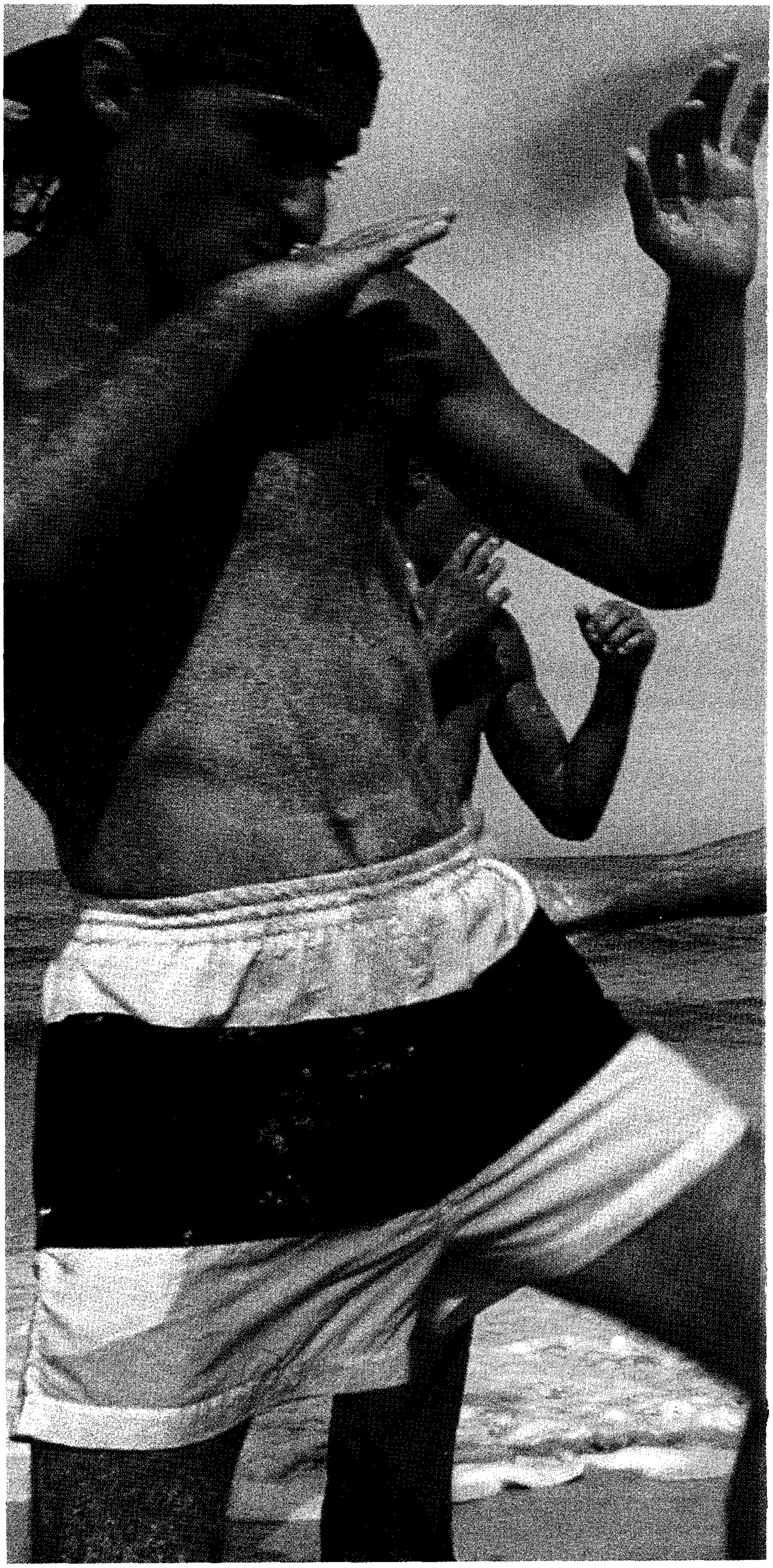
Life in Cuba has continued in its relentlessly strange fashion: Hilda Guevara, Che's eldest daughter, whom I knew and liked, died week before last of brain cancer at the age of thirty-nine. I went to her wake and funeral. Strange scene: no one spoke. My car battery was stolen, the kind of small incident hardly worth mentioning anywhere else, but here one which acquires huge dimensions and makes you feel the sky is falling in. Our remaining cockatoo flew away the day after Erica left, which made me feel uneasy, since every time a bird of mine has flown away someone close to me has died.

A man I know who used to work for the secret police is turning his house into a restaurant, to make ends meet while he awaits a visa to leave the country. The girl next door whose husband left on a raft a year ago is already on her second rebound. This one looks serious; her little boy already calls him "Papá." Our other neighbors have moved into their basement so as to rent the house itself to dollar-wielding tourists. At the moment, they have a couple of Italians and their Cuban *jinetera* girlfriends installed. In odd moments when I'm not writing, my pastime, besides drinking coffee, is to sit in the little garden and watch Maisy, our calico guinea pig, square off with the little white fighting cocks we've raised from chicks. Or to go and admire my banana tree. It is finally bearing fruit, which I will never see.

It isn't the same since Máximo, Rosie, and Bella left. Time to move on.

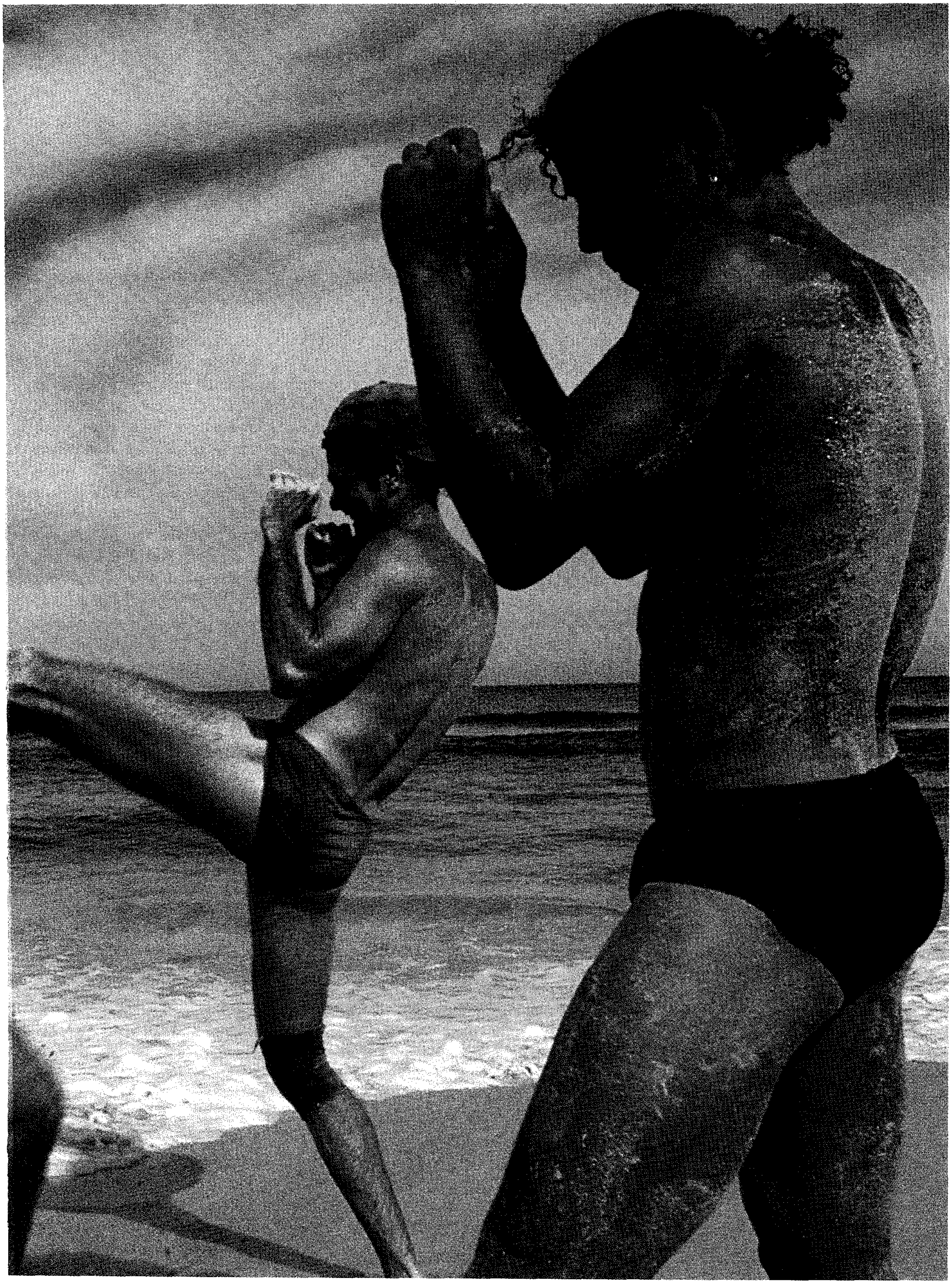
All for now. The very best from me,

JON LEE ◆



MAGNUM

RAGING BULLS *In 1992, the photographer met a Cuban athlete in Hava*



d was invited to watch him and his friends practicing kickboxing on the beach. Photograph by Gilles Peress.

FICTION

MIOSVATIS

A Cuban returns home to Havana on an errand.

BY MIGUEL BARNET

THE Zurich Museum is square. And cold. But it's got the best collection of Giacomettis I've ever seen. They're pretty sad, these sculptures by the Swiss master: old patinated-bronze figures—attenuated, contrite, their arms fused to their bodies. Restricted, those arms rob the body of freedom, turn the figures into prisoners chained to the artist's fancy. Of all the pieces in that museum, the saddest is a skinny but enormous dog mounted on a base that could be wood or marble, I don't remember which. It's the famous Giacometti dog reproduced on postcards that have been sent all over the planet. I didn't look at it for long because I like my animals alive, especially dogs. But Wolfgang did. Wolfgang looked at it carefully and then said, "Let's go downstairs and have a drink. I'm going to buy a postcard of Giacometti's dog."

In the cafeteria, I opened a diet Coca-Cola and watched as Wolfgang hurried off to get it. "This postcard," he told me when he returned, "you're going to take it back to Cuba and deliver it to Miosvatis, my black love, who lives on Trocadero Street. She's a very beautiful and tender woman. Do you mind?"

"Of course not, Wolfgang. I know your sweethearts always expect to get something from you."

Zurich is a gray city, an untouched cardboard stage set with a river and bridges like the ones in Leningrad, with ice-cream and peanut venders and violet-breasted pigeons that alight on your shoulder and eat from the palm of your hand, just like in a Vittorio De Sica movie. In the summertime, Zurich opens up like a music box, but in winter it's as sad as a cenotaph.

Wolfgang and I walked over the bridges, through the city, along the narrow medieval streets. We visited cafés where Tristan Tzara, Lenin, and Thomas Mann had sat to contemplate those same steel skies.

In one of the cafés, Wolfgang wrote up the card I was to take to Havana. "I'm called Juanito over there," he said, "because my real name is so strange." Then, sitting beside me, he wrote:

> Dear Miosvatis—This skinny sad dog is what I'm like here in Switzerland without you. Soon we'll meet in Cuba and I'll be a happy dog again.
>
> I'll be your puppy. All my love, Juanito.

I spilled my black-currant ice cream on my trousers, but so what? It was out of keeping with the Heineken Wolfgang was drinking, as we sat on a bench facing the river. An overcast late-summer sky made our conversation more intimate. We talked about Cuba as always, about the future, about the city of Dada; we saw a black barge loaded with Japanese tourists, and we were glad to be together again, my friend Wolfgang—I mean, Juanito—and I . . . setting the world to rights while the tourists photographed the bridge and the pigeons; maybe we even appeared in the photograph.

"We're going to buy some shoes for your mama," Wolfgang said. "Tell her the German sends them. And then we're going to buy some perfume for Miosvatis, and a blue Swatch—blue will go well with her skin."

Zurich is elegant. It's not a city where the crowded rush of consumer culture presses up against you. You shop in peace, and nobody comes along to shove merchandise in your face. We bought the shoes, perfume by Giorgio, and a watch with a blue wristband and a kaleidoscopic face.

Wolfgang and I said our goodbyes until we'd meet again in Havana.

THE next morning, I took the train to Paris. I crossed the loveliest lakes in Europe with the postcard, the Giorgio perfume, and the Swatch in my leather briefcase. Mother's shoes travelled in my luggage.

Juanito came along to say farewell at the station, but first we had mint tea in one of Zurich's fanciest pastry shops.

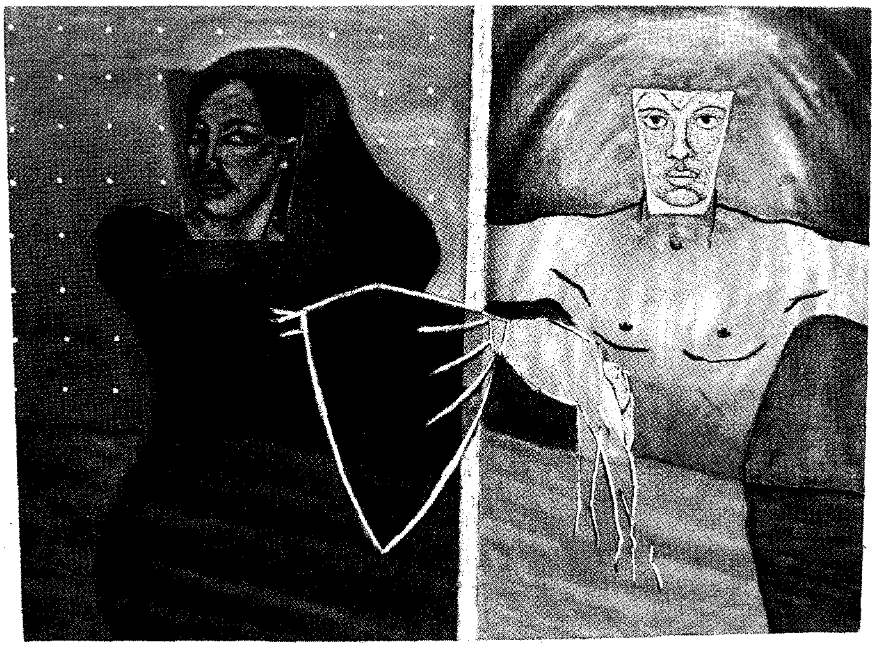
During the following month, I trotted all over Paris with these things in my bag for fear that someone would steal them or I'd lose them in one of the houses where I slept. In Paris, the whole story seemed unreal. Paris is not made of cardboard: it's a gray elephant that breathes with exuberance. The watch was a little more expensive in the Paris stores than in Zurich, but not the perfume; that we could have bought cheaper at any counter in the Galeries Lafayette or La Samaritaine. I sent Wolfgang a card—a lovely photo by Man Ray of Marcel Proust on his deathbed—and I assured him that the perfume, like the watch and his postcard, were safely stowed in the leather bag that never left my side.

Miosvatis became an obsession, or, rather, a talisman protected by a demiurge. Whenever I opened my bag and saw the card, the watch, and the perfume, I got an odd feeling: I wanted to go to Havana immediately and meet the object of Wolfgang's passion. I didn't want to take the things out of my bag. It was as if my city, the barrio Colón where she lived, and the idyllic Miosvatis herself were all very close to me. Sometimes I felt this was the only real thing I possessed, my strongest tie to the world.

Flying back in an Iberia DC-10, I wondered whether the customs officer at José Martí Airport would ask me to account for the blue watch. No! Anything but give up the watch that Juanito had bought for his beloved. But since my suitcase was small and I was carrying all my books and chocolates in my shoulder bag, no one asked me to account for anything, and the little watch entered Cuba duty-free, pretty and glowing with its wristband of translucent turquoise blue shining just as it had in the Swiss showcase—the chimerical faraway dream of Miosvatis.

As I got off the plane, even before I'd set foot on the tarmac, the humidity steamed up my glasses. It's Havana, I said to myself. This humidity will be the death of me someday, but then we all die, after all. And, full of happiness and new stories to tell, I made my way through the airport.

Outside the terminal, groups of relatives and friends of the passengers leaned against the barricades and with a mixture of joy and envy watched us come in from outside.



She had become an obsession, a talisman—the faraway dream of Cuba.

GILBERTO RUIZ/BARBARA GILLMAN GALLERY, MIAMI BEACH

THE first thing I did when I got home was unpack the watch, the perfume, and the postcard. The jet lag, six hours' worth, kept waking me up that night. In this waking dream, Miosvatis appeared in many different guises: as a millworker's daughter, a schoolteacher, a taxidriver, or simply a hooker who had opened Wolfgang's eyes to the fact that she was not just an ordinary black streetwalker.

The only thing that took my mind off my friend's sweetheart was my neglected apartment. The towels hung crooked on the towel racks, the plants had dried up, and the dust gave the place an air of faded dereliction that kept me from enjoying my happy return home. When I picked up the telephone, my mother informed me fearfully, "It's been broken ever since you left." I resigned myself. "Fine," I said. "Now my stay in Europe will be extended, since without a telephone I'm simply not here, I am no one, one who has not yet arrived."

I waited patiently for the telephone to be repaired, and then I made a few calls to give signs of life. Then, unable to hold off any longer, I headed for the barrio Colón bearing gifts, like one of the Magi.

The barrio Colón isn't really the barrio Colón anymore. Now it's one more barrio of Havana, a hive of people sitting along the sidewalks or playing dominoes in the streets, the men shirtless and the women in plastic sandals and hair curlers. Just another barrio with a few glowing embers of its ancient fame—a celebrated old red-light district come down in the world, where idleness spreads like an oil slick, or something even more viscous. The Revolution rooted out prostitution, but not the Cuban habit of living one's most intimate life, without shame, in the middle of the street.

It wasn't easy to park my car, because a number of chairs had to be moved and a couple of sharply dressed young girls had to be asked to get out of the way so that I could get close to the curb. They laughed and took their time moving onto the sidewalk, convinced that I was insolently robbing them of their space. The barrio reeked of rotten cabbage and cheap cologne, a peculiar stench that one soon gets used to. Neither of the girls was Miosvatis. I knew this without even asking.

Miosvatis was something else again. I didn't inquire after her, because that would have aroused curiosity. I simply knocked on the door of the address I had, and a thickset woman with hair dyed with *bijol* opened the door. To her, I mentioned the name of my friend's darling.

She answered me with an evil smile. "She lives on the top floor," she said, "but she's not there, she went out with a boyfriend. But come in, come in. In this barrio everybody wants to know your business—gossip spreads like weeds here. Look, they're already watching us."

The old woman invited me into her ground-floor apartment—the ceiling peeling and the floor a carpet of silent cats and dogs. "Don't your dogs bark?" I asked.

"No, that's the way they are. I've got them trained." She ignored them, as if they weren't there.

Against the light, I was able to make out a tinted photograph of the old woman in her youth, pretty and with her lips accentuated by an imprudent use of lipstick which dated the image to the mid-fifties—an era of thick features and lurid colors. She said something softly that I couldn't hear because she feared eavesdroppers. She talked a lot, eager to take advantage of a stranger's ear, and of course she wanted to know what I was doing there. I explained that I wasn't sure of Miosvatis's apartment number. And she looked up wide-eyed, but not so much surprised as complicit. "You bringing her something? That little package is for her? You're Spanish?"

"No, Ma'am, I'm Cuban..."

"Ah, Cuban! But you live outside."

"No, Ma'am, I live here, and I've come to bring a present for your neighbor."

"Good enough, but she's not here—I told you, she went out with a friend. But not a guy from here, from this barrio, no. Me, it's the first time I've seen him. He's mulatto, lighter-skinned, a lot lighter-skinned than her."

The woman's opaque eyes searched mine. Staring back at them, I realized that the irises were ringed with a halo of white, and that her eyelashes were white as well. As I did not speak, she told me that Miosvatis lived on the top floor. “But she’s not there, you know, she’s always going off into the streets and leaving the kids up there with her younger sister. Look, nobody’s up there, because the window that faces my courtyard is closed, unless the sister’s asleep and the girls are running around in the street. If you want, I’ll hold on to something for you. The little package, that’s for Miosvatis? Don’t worry, you can leave it with me, but they don’t deserve it. They throw filth down at me. I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but yes, sir, just to annoy me they throw wads of Miosvatis’s daughters’ shit out the window, and I’ve reported them to the police, but nothing, they won’t even listen to me. But come on through here—would you like some water? You could suffocate in this heat. Where’d you say you were from? Oh, yes, Cuba, but you live on the outside! Well, however you want, either you leave the little package with me or you come back another day, make up your mind.”

A plaque of the Virgin of Charity of Cobre, her robe stained with grease and her sparse hair also colored by the dust of *bijol*, was hung high on the wall. The floor in this room was uneven and seemed almost like an ancient artifact, made up of filthy tiles, shabby and broken.

The old woman was about to say something when an earsplitting scream came from above. “It’s her,” she said. “It’s her, she was there all the time, but they hide to spy on people—and I only do them favors. It’s on account of me that those baby girls drink condensed milk.” There was a second scream, this time a little less sharp, as if the screamer knew she’d been heard down in the first-floor apartment, where I was now sitting in a wicker armchair with a broken seat. The old woman pointed at me and said, “Go up, go on up. It’s four flights, you’ll know which one is theirs.”

“I’M Yalaine,” said the woman who answered the door. She was a beautiful black woman, compact, a sculpture composed of solid volumes. “It’s a pleasure, come in, make yourself at home. Pardon that I haven’t dressed the girls—it’s the heat, it puts us right to sleep. I heard you talking to that old gossip and I said to myself, ‘That’s a message for me from Manuel.’ Right?”

“No, *compañera*, it’s for Miosvatis.”

“Ah, for my sister! You can leave it with me—don’t worry, that way you won’t have to come back. My sister went out on an errand about an hour ago, but she won’t be back till late. It’s from Gunther?”

“No, no, it’s from Juanito.”

“Ah, Juanito, yeah, yeah, my sister’s fiancé. Thanks!”

Yalaine shut the twins in the other room, and between the girls’ screams and my own uneasiness in that slum I don’t remember the moment when I handed her the perfume, the postcard, and the watch.

“Miosvatis has been waiting to hear from Juanito for days,” she said. “He wants to marry her, but my sister’s not sure because of the two kids, and she just got a little job . . . It’s not easy, you know? But you’re not German.”

“No, no, I’m Cuban and a friend of Juanito’s. I saw him over there, and he gave me this for your sister. He talked a lot about her.”

Yalaine offered me coffee. “Juanito bought these cups because he likes to drink Cuban coffee in fine cups. He’s sure got white hands, and delicate. He’s a man who’s very . . .”

Miosvatis and Yalaine’s apartment could have been a set for a vernacular piece at the Teatro Martí. Off to one side, near the window that opened onto a tiny balcony, was a pair of vases with wax flowers covered in soot. On the other side, a broken clock that had stopped at ten sat next to a statue of St. Barbara with black ovals embroidered on her cloak and the tip of her nose chipped off.

The smell of rotten cabbage was now mixed with a sweet and penetrating French perfume to which I had an allergic reaction that was impossible to hide. “Excuse me,” Yalaine said. “I’m going to put this stuff for my sister under lock and key, because if I don’t the girls will ruin it in no time—they grab everything, but everything. And for my sister what comes from Juanito is sacred. Would you like some more coffee?”

“No, thanks.”

Yalaine went into the other room and came out again dressed in brilliant blue satin, with earrings she’d got from the diplomats’ store brushing against her Baule princess shoulders. She looked at me with suspicion, but also with appreciation. She’d have liked me to stay longer. She apologized for the disorder and the dust that covered everything.

“With these girls, there’s never time for anything. And my sister and I are

IT IS ALWAYS THE CHILDREN WHO DISTANCE THEMSELVES

It is always the children who distance themselves,
their fingers welded to great suitcases
in which their mothers have saved both dreams and horror.

On platforms and in airports
they are taking in everything
as if they were saying, “Where will we go today?”
It is always the children who distance themselves.
To us they are small, invisible, anxious strings.
At night they cling fiercely to our bodies;
but always they distance themselves, jumping about, singing
in circles (some of them in tears)
so that not even a father can hear them.

—Heberto Padilla

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Alastair Reid.*)

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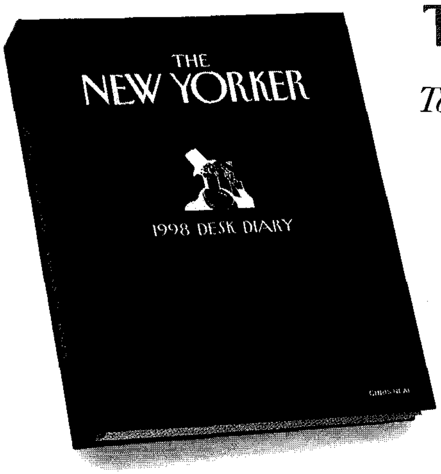

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alone here. Our mother died and we're all the family we've got." I didn't look at her in any way indiscreetly. I just wanted to get up and leave. Then she asked, "Did Juanito say he was going to marry my sister?"

"No, he didn't say."

"I'm asking because I'm not going to get stuck with the girls. Imagine! She's going to have to take them."

"They're very pretty—they look like you."

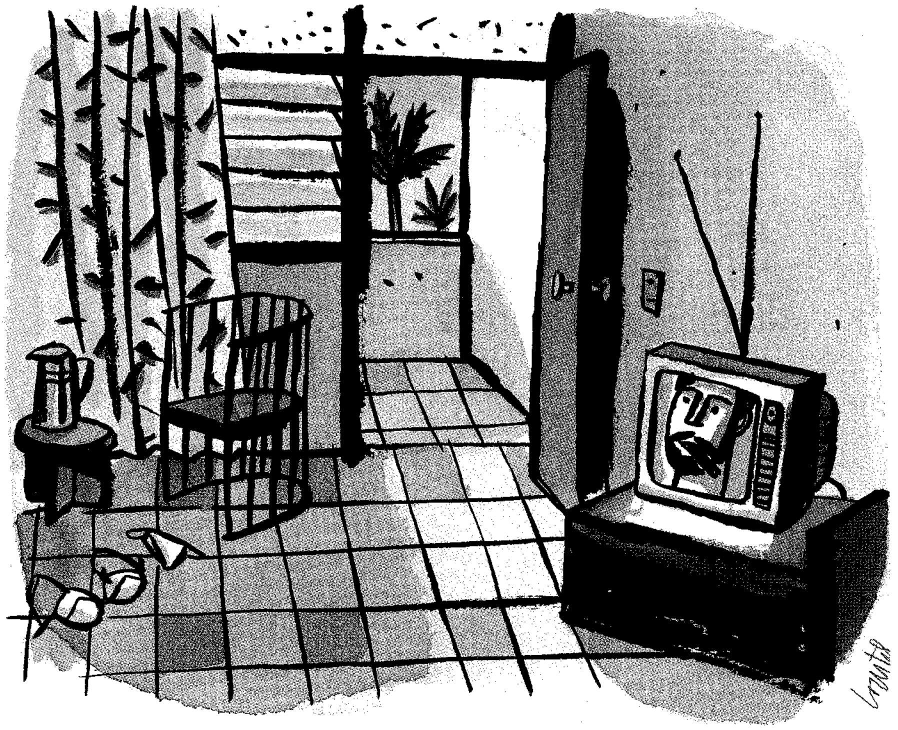
"Yeah, but they're not mine. It's on account of my sister and me, we look alike."

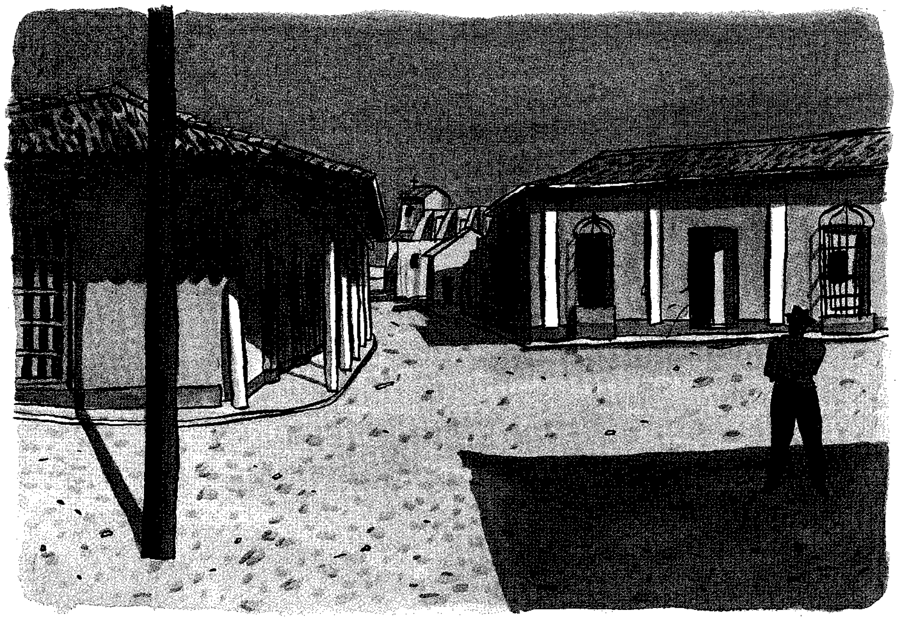
I started to sneeze. I don't know if it was the dust or the cloying supersweet perfume. I said goodbye, thinking of Wolfgang in that Zurich pastry shop, under those orange umbrellas in that dry and elegant autumn in the city of Giacometti.

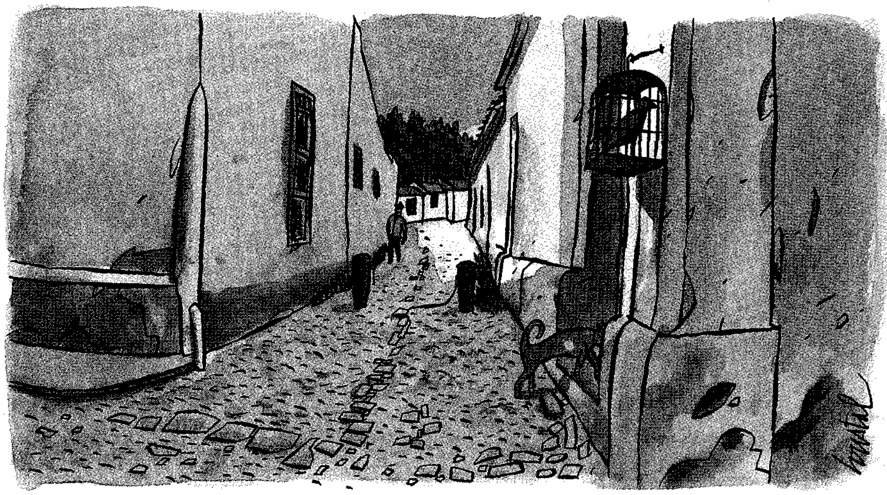
As I went down the stairs, the odor of rotting cabbage got stronger, now mixed with cat piss. Dirty black stains splotched the marble stairs of what might once have been a bright and flamboyant house of prostitution. The cat woman had her door open, but she made no move to say goodbye to me. Maybe she was afraid I'd told Yalaine something of what we'd talked about. In her eyes I saw only empty indifference.

Coming out into the high afternoon sun, with my shirt sticking to my skin, I saw a group of men around my car. I shot a quick glance at the tires, the rearview mirror, the windshield wipers, and opened the door, feigning confidence in this barrio and its people. I didn't start the car right away; I even looked up. Yalaine was waving goodbye, and I realized from this distance that her front teeth had an even wider gap than I'd noticed. Who was lovelier, Yalaine or Miosvatis? Perhaps I'll never know. The engine turned over, and I was about to step on the accelerator when two girls approached the car window. Curious, and with assumed familiarity, they asked in unison, "You're a friend of Juanito's?" I smiled and stepped on the gas. At that hour, the Malecón was almost deserted. Only a tourist couple in Bermuda shorts and a sad and sickly dog, like Giacometti's, were silhouetted against the landscape. ♦

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Chris Brandt.*)







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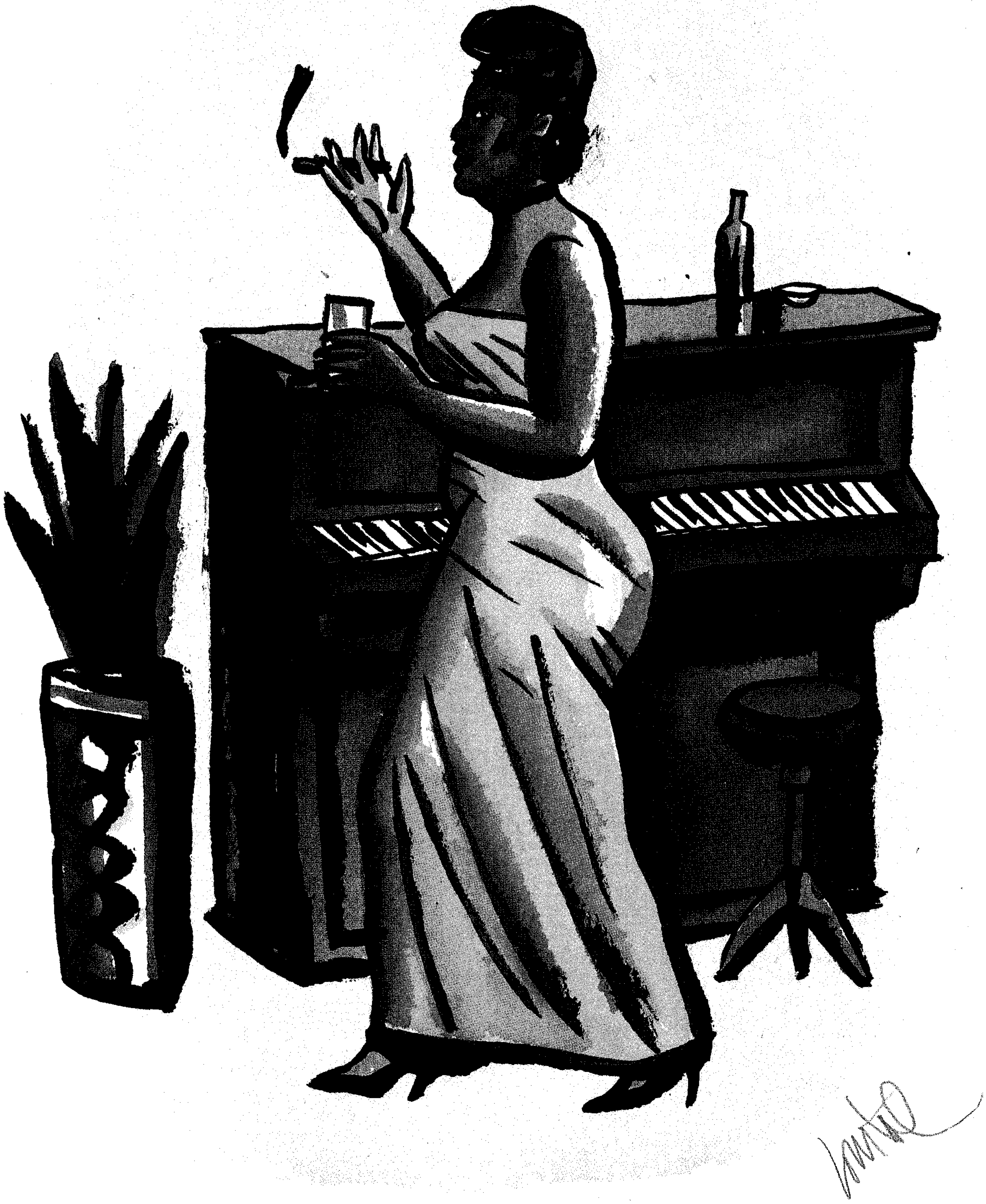
BÉSAME MUCHO



HUGOMANIA

For Victor Hugo, nothing succeeded like excess.

BY PAUL BERMAN

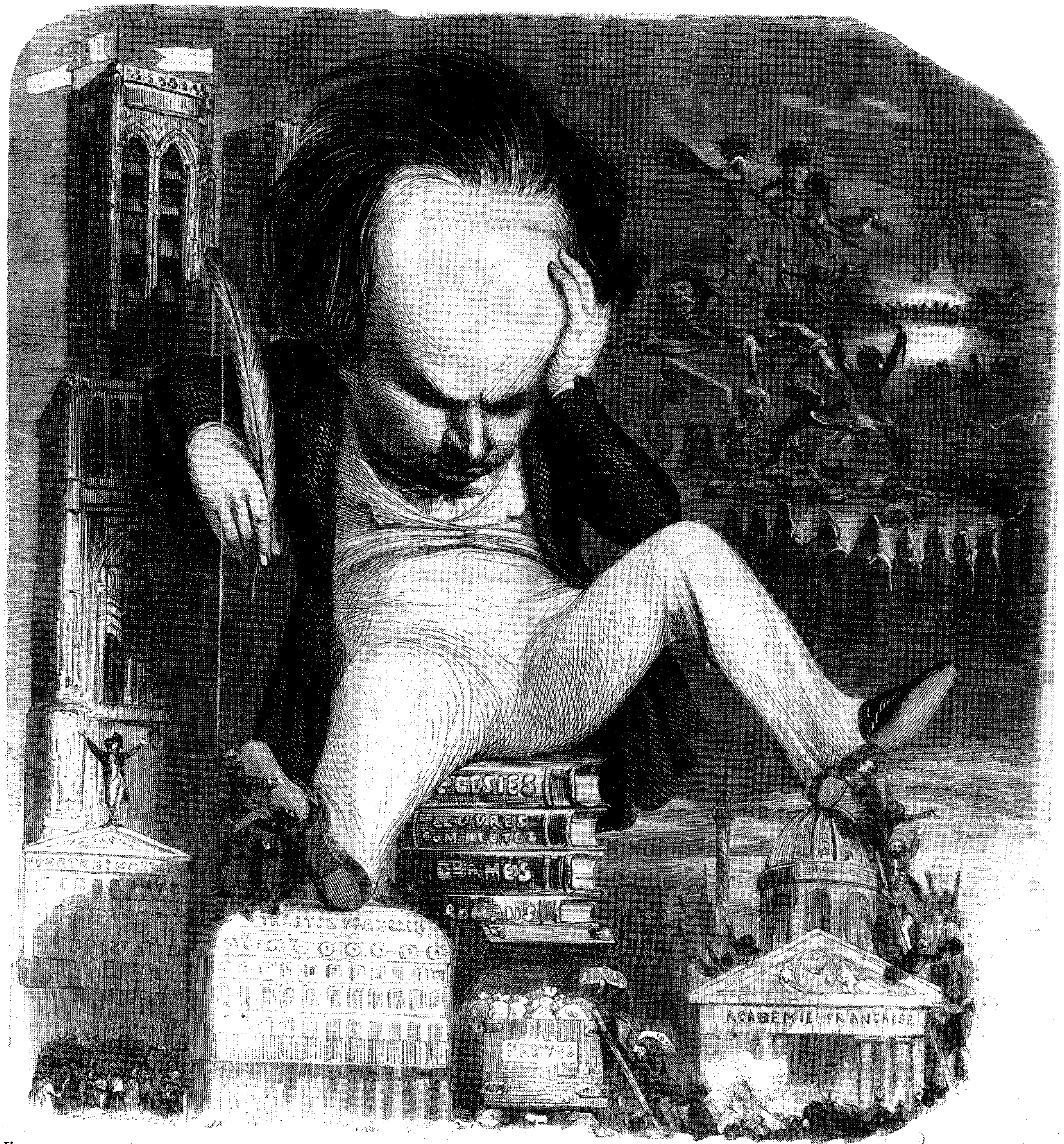
WHAT can account for the weirdly inflated personalities of so many writers from a hundred and fifty years ago—the extravagant traits and cosmic ambitions upon which Victor Hugo, who loved everything grandiose, fondly pasted the label "monstrous"? Emerson and Whitman thought of themselves as gods, more or less. Dickens never doubted that he was much more than a writer—that he was childhood's sword and shield against the heartless adult world. Balzac appointed himself the recording secretary of French society and proceeded to write novels at a fantastic speed with the intention of capturing the whole of life. And Victor Hugo outdid everyone else. His mental and sensory capacities appear to have been superhuman. According to Graham Robb, the author of "Victor Hugo: A Biography" (Norton; $39.95), Hugo possessed "a spectacular, long-term photographic memory," one so powerful that, even in old age, he never told the same story twice to the same person. His ear could locate the underground noises of moles and ants. His eyesight could zoom in, binocularlike, on the farthest distances.

In a famous chapter in "Notre-Dame de Paris" (he hated the title "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame," which was tacked onto his book by one of his free-spirited English translators), Hugo gazed down from one of the cathedral towers to describe in archeological detail the jumble-tumble streets of medieval Paris, quite as if, like a video camera mounted on a smart bomb, he were fully capable of entering the tiny, faraway windows and exploring their draped interiors—and that chapter reflects what are said to be the actual capabilities of his powerful eye. The intensity of his visual experiences led him to take up drawing and painting. Almost three thousand drawings are known to remain, not to mention his paintings, some of which are quite good, full of splattery brushstrokes ornamenting the giant initials "V.H." with galactic vapors, or illustrating characters from his own novels—the grinning imp Gavroche from "Les Misérables," and the man-eating giant octopus from "The Toilers of the Sea," undulating its puckered arms.

His sexual energies were vast. As a young man, he upheld a stern morality, and in one of his early volumes of poetry, "Les Orientales," he condemned, with a gaze that lingered a moment too long, the harems of barbarous Ottoman sultans. Yet his own desires were not easily satisfied—he could make love nine times a day—and to his official wife, Adèle, he eventually added an unofficial wife, Juliette Drouet, whom he maintained in a humiliatingly smaller home nearby. Then he resolutely cheated on both wives with actresses, maids, the barber's wife, his son's mistress, and anybody else who proved vulnerable to a seductive recitation of rhymed couplets by France's greatest master of the rhymed couplet. He grew fond of prostitutes, too, and in later years visited them daily. Even when he was in his seventies, his distressed family had to conspire to keep the frisky old poet from escaping into the streets in search of adventures in no one knew what shady corners of Paris. And these amorous enthusiasms were expressed not just in the flesh but in verse—the lyric odes of a cheerful satyr, courtly and mischievous, a little too pleased with himself to push into the darker zones of the sensual, but flirty and amusing and (as always in Hugo's writings) agreeably sympathetic toward the downtrodden and the rebellious.

HE wrote in more styles and genres than anyone else I can think of. English-language readers know Hugo mostly through "Notre-Dame de Paris" and "Les Misérables" and maybe one or two other novels that are much too calculated and ponderous for my taste but are gorgeously rich in Gothic bell towers, Parisian barricades, ancient Brittany forests, and Atlantic sea storms—those superimaginative landscapes that Hugo could produce at the level of genius (thus guaranteeing immortal life for his novels, especially in the world of theatre and film, where spectacle is king). Yet if you picture his collected works as an overstuffed Second Empire parlor the giant novels occupy only a single corner, tucked between the easel and the collection of medieval helmets. He put an equal effort into his plays, one of which, "Hernani," truly a ridiculous swashbuckler, set off a riot at its opening and even today survives in the form of a lesser opera by Verdi, "Ernani" (while a lesser play of Hugo's, "Le Roi S'Amuse," survives as one of Verdi's greater operas, "Rigoletto"). And, beyond the monumental novels and the operatic plays, Hugo's greatest energies went into his poetry, one fat volume after another inscribed with idylls, epics, imprecations, satires, polemics, chants, ballads, songs, prayers, and sci-fi fantasies. It was a poetry meant to resemble those same medieval streets he saluted in "Notre-Dame de Paris," full of noise and bizarre things, cheerfully hostile to the laws of good taste—a poetry of visual images, a painter's poetry.

He went through an Orientalist period, a medievalist period, a Spanish period, a German period, an English period, a red revolutionary period, a grandfatherly period, and a mystical period awash in table-knocking spiritualism. Yet somewhere beneath each of those phases you can see a single insistent doctrine, the deepest of all his many beliefs. It was an idea about history—the grand old idea from the early and middle nineteenth century that man begins in darkness, and history is grim, yet man is dragging himself forward, and eventually avalanches of freedom and enlightenment will fall upon him. And how, exactly, does man drag himself forward? Through the deeds and



His ear could locate the underground noises of moles and ants, and his eyesight could zoom in, binocularlike, on the farthest distances.

JEAN-LOUP CHARMET ARCHIVE

words of prophets and heroes, which in ancient times meant the founders of great religions but in modern times had come to mean the geniuses of literature. Among the nineteenth-century writers who cultivated extravagant personalities, nearly everyone subscribed to some aspect of that very broad and stirring idea. And Victor Hugo subscribed with a heartier gusto than anyone else.

He believed that progress in literature corresponds to progress in human liberty, and that artistic advances are moral advances, which meant that if he could only produce a few literary innovations of his own he, too, would be a liberator of mankind. As it turned out, literary innovations came to him with an inexplicable ease. He did not grow up in an artistic household. His father was a military officer, who rose through the ranks to become one of Napoleon's generals—the very last of the Napoleonic commanders to cease fighting after the calamity at Waterloo, in 1815, when little Victor was thirteen. His mother, estranged from his father, became the lover of one of Napoleon's conspiratorial enemies in Paris, and may even have done some conspiring herself. Yet in that environment, drenched with war and politics, the young boy somehow became a prodigy of poetry. Well-composed verses took shape unwilled in his mind, sometimes in his sleep and obsessively in his waking hours.

He was a victim, Robb tells us, of the

peculiar mental disorder known in the nineteenth century as metromania, in which the brain, like a twitching muscle, secretes verbal rhythms and rhymes at an uncontrollable rate. And the results were astounding. At the age of fifteen, he entered a poetry contest sponsored by the French Academy, and might very well have won except that he committed the tactical error of revealing how ridiculously young he was, which seems to have given the judges pause. Before he was twenty, he was leading a revolution in verse, supported by an entire generation of young writers—though the young generation consisted mostly of Hugo himself, writing under eleven pseudonyms in a magazine published by his older brother. I've never fully understood the formal elements of Hugo's revolution, apart from a willingness to break a few minuscule rules of old-fashioned prosody—a willingness, for instance, to string together explosive alliterations like "The priests who prayed have perished," which is one of the innovations that Robb singles out for mention. Yet those innovations, whatever they were, got the conservative critics complaining, which gave the poet a chance to draw his sword, and commit mayhem, and boast:

> Yes, it's true, these are some of my crimes.
> I took and demolished the Bastille of rhymes.

The most jewel-like of his books, I think, is "Les Orientales," written in Paris during his twenties—a book of voluptuous warrior fantasies about Turks, Jews, Greeks, Arabs, and Spaniards, a violent book, insolent, buoyant, and tense. (There was always something scary about Victor Hugo, except when he was in his lovable grandfather mode.) But his true masterpiece has got to be a volume called "La Légende des Siècles," to which are properly appended, in the Pléiade edition in France, two unfinished works, "La Fin de Satan" and "Dieu." He labored over these writings off and on for decades in his difficult, later years, and the result, at more than a thousand pages, is both preposterous and sublime. "La Légende des Siècles" and its epilogues recount nothing less than the history of the universe, in the form of legends. The book is one of those nineteenth-century supertomes which aspire to contain every possible piece of wisdom about man and eternity, something like "The Human Comedy," "Leaves of Grass," or "The Phenomenology of Spirit," except gaudier—a mad, disorderly procession of ancient gods, Biblical episodes, the Seven Wonders of the World (with each wonder declaiming in its own oracular voice), tyrannical sultans, El Cid, and Roland. There are Catholic Inquisitors and corrupt popes, fulminations against dictatorship, idylls of love, poems of Pan and the woods and seduction, and astronomical meditations, all of it wending from the earliest Edenic dawns into the age of steamships and outward to the cosmos.

Most of "La Légende" follows the verse form of twelve-syllable alexandrines (French verse metres are generally counted in syllables, not in metric feet) arranged in couplets, which can wear on the ear after five or six hundred pages. The effect is always grand, though. The stories are treasures. The titan Pthos, imprisoned under Mt. Olympus by the tyrannical gods, breaks his chains, escapes to the outside world, discovers a previously unnoticed enormous eyeball staring down from the heavens, and climbs the mountaintop to inform the terrified Olympians, "O gods, there is a God!" A cruel king with a bronze eagle ornamenting his helmet chases a young knight into the woods and slaughters him—and the eagle turns on the king and gouges out his eyes. An emperor murders a nobleman's granddaughter and orders the nobleman decapitated—only to have his own head inexplicably fly off his body while, in the distant zones of the azure sky, an archangel can be seen drying his sword on the clouds. A Spanish lord, abandoned by his evil son, descends into the crypt of his castle to commune with a statue of an ancestor—and the statue's bronze hand caresses the heartbroken father's cheek. A feather from Satan's wing, tumbling behind him in the abyss of space, metamorphoses into the angel Liberty and goes to challenge Satan in his lair: the "colossal reptile in the infinite cesspool."

And all these lyric meditations and gory tales of justice keep pointing toward a larger story of forward motion—of progress in the realms of political freedom and of science and, equally, in the realm of verse. By the end of "La Légende des Siècles," Hugo has sent mankind soaring through the futuristic skies of the twentieth century on a flying machine called an aeroscaphe (much ad-

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DEFINITION

Exile
is living where there is no house whatever
in which we were ever children;
where there are no mice in the courtyards
or any starched spinsters
at their weaving behind the jalousies.

To be
perhaps already irretrievably
somewhere it is not possible
to be struck crossing a street
by the memory of how, precisely,
on an afternoon of skids and escapades
that car crashed into the store
leaving its profile on the column
where it remains to this day
despite countless coats of whitewash
and too many years.

—Lourdes Casal
(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Elizabeth Macklin.*)

mired by Jules Verne, according to Robb), fashioned from Newton's physics and Pindar's odes. Standing at his writing desk (Robb tells us that Hugo wrote "La Légende" standing up) with his pen in the air, waiting for the next perfect rhyme to drop effortlessly into its foreordained place, Hugo must have felt that human progress was flowing metrically from his own imagination; must have felt that he had become as great as any hero or god who traipses across his pages; must have felt electric tingles in his flesh as his pen descended once more to the paper to push mankind forward to the measure of yet one more completed couplet. He became a superman because his own doctrines of history and the arts called for him to be one; and because his amazing fluency in several fields of literature persuaded him that he really did have a superman's gifts; and because this belief imbued him with a heliumlike self-confidence, which lifted him up and away, the poet on his own aeroscaphe, safely above the gravitational pull of insecurity and doubt.

ROBB'S biography is solid, thick (at almost seven hundred pages), factually reliable, genially knowledgeable about French literature, and cleverly written. Robb says of Hugo's prose, "Vastly extended metaphors moved over the subject like weather systems." I like his remark that Hugo's early poetry was aimed at crowds, which were expected to break into cheers at the end of every stanza. Robb's enthusiasm for the monumental novels and some of his other literary judgments leave me unpersuaded, however, and his indignation at Hugo's personal life and self-promotional habits goes a bit far. But the principal failing of his book—a terrible failing, characteristic of too many literary biographies—is that it quotes only a few snippets of the poetry. Robb excuses himself by saying, in regard to the epilogues of "La Légende des Siècles," that "to give a short quotation would be like using a cup of water to explain the sea." The right short quotation would be nothing like a cup of water, though. Here is the opening section of one of those epilogues, "La Fin de Satan," in my own, unrhymed translation—a few lines that show the booming sound of Hugo's voice whenever the mood to rewrite the Bible came upon him, which was often:

> For four thousand years he was falling through the abyss.
>
> He had not yet been able to grab onto a hilltop

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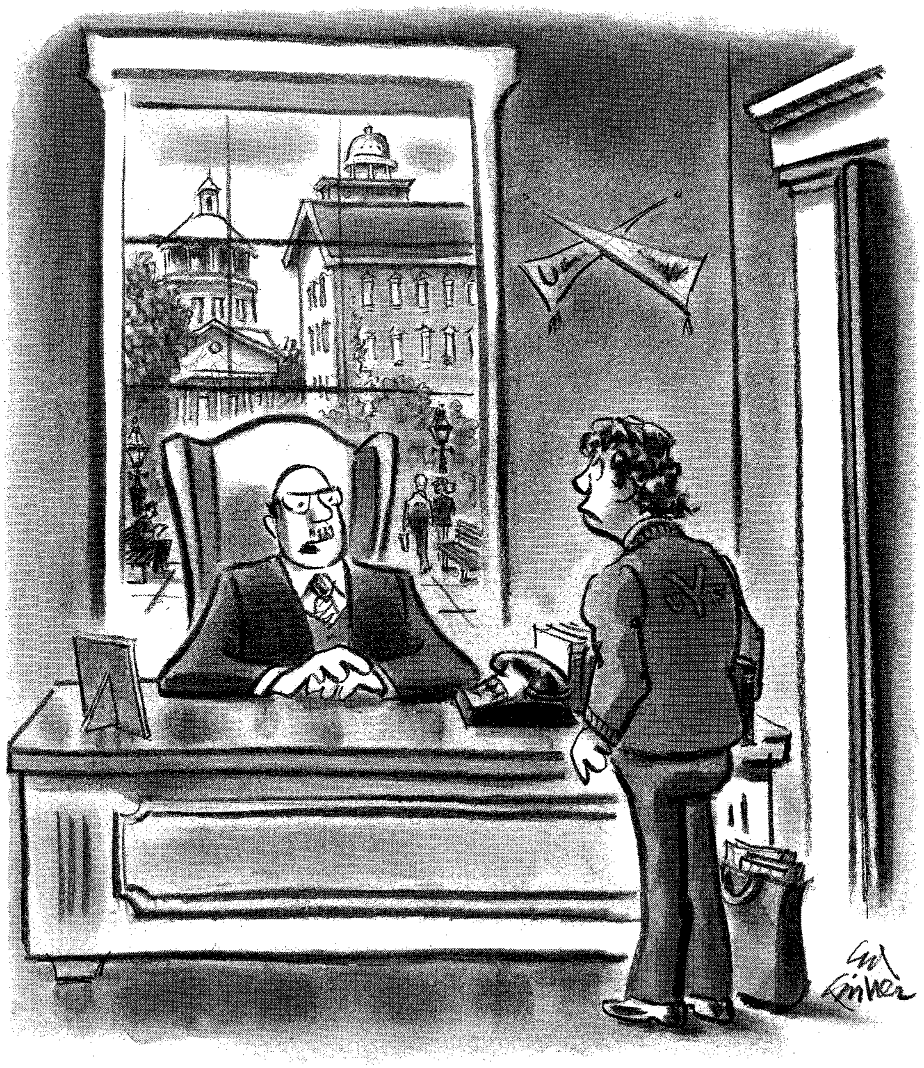
Or to raise even once his measureless brow.
He was sinking in the dark and the haze, bewildered,
Alone, and, behind him, in the eternal nights,
Were falling more slowly the feathers of his wings.

He was falling thunderstruck, mournful, silent,
Sad, his mouth open and his feet toward the skies,
The horror of the abyss imprinted on his livid face.
He cried, "Death!"—his fists held out toward the empty darkness.
This word was later man and its name was Cain.

What is best about Robb's biography is its focus on Hugo the public figure—and again, Hugo's life yields a giant theme. For, on top of writing his books and painting his pictures and chasing women, Hugo managed to pursue with real seriousness a career as a political leader—originally as a royalist and reactionary, then, after mature reflection, as a republican and a socialist of a nondogmatic sort. He was brave, too. In 1851, Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, Louis-Napoleon, staged a coup d'état, and Hugo, forty-nine years old, left his house in the Montmartre district, with its knickknacks and mirrors and a naked Venus over his bed, and went into the streets to harangue the crowds: "Citizens! You have two hands. Take your legal rights in one and your rifle in the other and attack Bonaparte!"

But there was no uprising, so Hugo fled to Belgium and then, after the timid Belgian authorities reacted fearfully to his presence, to England's Channel Islands, off the Normandy coast. He spent most of the next two decades in heroic isolation on those islands, first on Jersey, then on Guernsey in his elaborately renovated Hauteville House (with a small home for Juliette Drouet nearby, as always). And from those islands he waged a campaign of supremely articulate vilification of Louis-Napoleon's dictatorship. Hugo was a Solzhenitsyn, as Robb points out—the first Solzhenitsyn in European letters. Classic volumes of political and social protest welled up from him volcanically during those years: "Les Misérables" (which immediately went on the Catholic Index of prohibited literature); the first edition of "La Légende des Siècles"; "The Toilers of the Sea"; some journalism; and a solid volume of invective called "Les Châtiments," consisting of furious curses and sneers in verse, arranged under such gloriously sardonic headings as "Society Is Saved" and "The Family Is Restored." And each book in turn went floating skyward across the Channel into France and rained sulfuric condemnation on every revolting thing that was taking place under the despotism of Napoleon's nephew.

By the time Hugo made his way back to Paris, at a moment when the dictatorship had collapsed into wars and massacres, those several books and his adamant spirit had converted him into a kindly, bearded symbol of national virtue and republican ideals. He was repeatedly elected to the National Assembly, then to the Senate. There was talk of his running for President. It's true that he had no talent for back-room legislative deal-making, and perhaps no desire to be a politician in the ordinary sense. He said, "I find that delivering one speech is as exhausting as ejaculating three times—even four!" But he was a success at reassuring everyone in France, except the extreme right and the hierarchs of the Catholic Church (who thought him insane), of the compatibility of republican values and national greatness. On his seventy-ninth birthday, in 1881, more than half a million of his loyal fellow-citizens paraded in his honor past his new home in the sixteenth arrondissement. Five thousand musicians played "La Marseillaise." His street was renamed Avenue Victor Hugo. When he died, four years later, a crowd larger than the entire population of Paris accompanied his pauper's hearse (Hugo's faultless theatrical instincts extended even into the details of his own funeral) across the city to his burying place, in the Pantheon.



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ROBB says that Hugo ended up the most famous man in the entire world during his era—which is probably true, if only because Queen Victoria was a woman. Worldwide

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18 WON + T

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1 A(R)ES (*sea* rev.)
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BRIEFLY NOTED

The Voice of the Turtle: An Anthology of Cuban Stories, edited by Peter Bush (Grove/Atlantic; $14). This polymorphic collection demonstrates a variety of styles (agrarian myth, beach-lit erotica, heretic surrealism, urban drollery) and a range of settings (plantation, mountain, Miami airport, Vatican City) which show both the richness of the island landscape and the extent of the Cuban diaspora. Of particular interest are "Where I Stand," Edmundo Desnoes's saga of hapless intellectuals sent to work in the sugarcane fields, and the title story, by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a hilarious allegory of a village boy caught in flagrante with a beached sea turtle.

Next Year in Cuba by Gustavo Pérez Firmat (Anchor; $12.95). It is not his missed fate as the son of a Cuban millionaire ("Grand Cuban style meant big: big houses, big cars, a big yacht, big jewelry, big furs, big cigars") but his identity as an exile that the author, now a professor at Duke, seeks to address in this memoir. In 1960, at the age of eleven, Firmat and his family left Cuba for Miami with thirty-two suitcases to wait out the Castro Revolution: their life of cramped quarters and Spam sandwiches in Little Havana was only a way of marking time until *regreso*, a return to their homeland. Although he is not the most eloquent writer on the emotional displacement of exile, he is skilled at evoking the richness of a world where humor eases hardship, the men play dominoes and the women play canasta, and everyone "seems to have a syphilitic great-uncle."

Waiting for Fidel, by Christopher Hunt (Houghton Mifflin; $13). The contrived premise of this book is that its American author went to Cuba (in spite of U.S. restrictions) with the intention of meeting Fidel Castro. Once there, he journeyed the length of the island, travelling as Cubans do, by waiting for trucks to stop and haul human cargo on top of the goods they are carrying. The picture of decay, hunger, prostitution, and ubiquitous police informers is tempered by many examples of hospitality extended by impoverished Cubans. This is, unfortunately, an odyssey with no return to Ithaca, and the sameness of the episodes along the way leaves the reader, like the writer, waiting for a defining event that never occurs.

Old Havana, by Claudio Edinger, with an introduction by Humberto Werneck (DBA; $35). In this collection of photographs taken around Havana, the citizens of a crumbling city are shown awash in an orange light that is as warm as it is eerie. As befits modern Cuba, Edinger embraces contradiction, and his portraits—of, among other things, a man selling grapefruit to be turned into "steak"; apartment dwellers rearing chickens and pigs; a teen-age ballet dancer and her tiny dog, Chester—are both spontaneous and stagy, vibrant and flat, bitter and nostalgic.

adulation was not necessarily ideal for his writing, though. It is always agreeable for a talented author to become a street, but to become an avenue can be a little much. A depressing number of Hugo's sappiest poems have established themselves as staples of French literature, and lately "Notre-Dame de Paris" has been reduced to a sort of stuffed animal by Disney. Genius that he was, the mere idea of Victor Hugo, I'm afraid, can seem slightly comic today. Yet who was to blame for that downward curve in his reputation? There are moments in "Les Misérables" when he seems the spitting image of any cagey French politician, catering to one sector of the public after another—now the Catholic liberals, now the radical socialists, now the worshippers of Napoleon—as if, in his mind, the line between literature and coalition-building had grown a bit vague.

His hunger for popular acclaim had a bad effect on the poetry, too. In "Les Orientales" the young Hugo included a poem of two simple stanzas called "Ecstasy," in which he described himself standing at the water's edge and thinking about God. But he became gassier in time, and fonder of himself, and craftier. Eventually, he reëmerged with an updated version called "Magnitudo Parvi" (meaning, in Latin, "The Grandeur of the Little")—a central poem in the Hugolian œuvre, in which, still standing at the water's edge and thinking about God, he gesticulates at twinkling stars and lonely hermits' huts and all kinds of other symbols to explain, over a span of twenty-five windswept pages, the meaning of the universe, nothing less. "Magnitudo Parvi" came out in a book called "Les Contemplations" in 1856, a year after the first edition of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" and a year before the first edition of Baudelaire's "Flowers of Evil," and it must be said that all three poets, citizens of their age, share a good many thoughts and images. But the comparison with Whitman and Baudelaire is devastating to Hugo. In that poem about stars and huts and the universe, Hugo looks like a man orating in front of a mirror. You find yourself wondering if, for all his talent, he wasn't essentially a fake.

With Hugo, though, the thing to do whenever he arouses that suspicion is to keep turning the pages, secure in the certainty that he was, in fact, talented, and was only sometimes a fake. "Les Contemplations" goes directly from the stars and the huts to record what was plainly the hardest, most unbearable event of Hugo's life—not the failure of his uprising in 1851 or his exile from France but the death of his daughter Léopoldine in a boating accident at Villequier, on the Seine. You might suppose that if Hugo had subscribed in every inch of his soul to his many theories about eternity, solitude, the wisdom of prophets, and the greatness of France, those several profundities would console him then, and in writing about his daughter he would bang his drum harder than ever. But no. He becomes less theatrical, not more so. In the opening section of a poem called "At Villequier" he speaks with tremendous intensity, yet in a reasonably natural way, like this (except that, in rendering his lines into English, I cannot re-create his perfect rhyme and perfect metre):

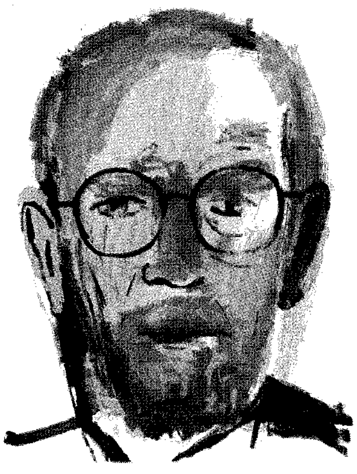
> Now that Paris, its paving stones and its marble,
> Its fogs and its roofs are quite far from my eyes,
> Now that I am under the branches of the trees,
> And can dream of the beauty of the heavens;
>
> Now that from mourning, which darkened my soul,
>   I am emerging, pale and victorious,
> And I feel the peacefulness of nature,
>   Which enters my heart;
>
> Now that I can, seated at the edge of the waves,
> Moved by this superb and tranquil horizon,
> Examine in myself the deep truths
> And look at flowers that are in the grass;
>
> Now, O my God!, that I have the sombre calm
>   To be able henceforth
> To see with my eyes the stone in whose shade I know
>   She sleeps forever;
>
> Now that, softened by these divine spectacles,
> Plains, forests, rocks, valleys, silvery water,
> Seeing my littleness and seeing your miracles,
> I recover my reason in the face of the immensity;
>
> I come to you, Lord, father in whom I must believe,
>   I bring you, pacified,
> The pieces of this heart, full of your glory,
>   Which you have broken;
>
> I come to you, Lord, confessing that you are
> Good, merciful, indulgent, and sweet, O living God!

That is the chant of someone whose shoulders are quietly heaving in one rhythm, and whose blood is racing in a second rhythm, and who is trying to tell us, in still another rhythm, that his shoulders are not heaving and his blood is not racing—a poem of absolute fidelity to absolute grief. It shows us that Hugo's cosmologies and his history of mankind are all very nice, and in places magnificent, and they are certainly the source of his spectacular self-confidence, but this man's personality is authentically enormous, and in some corner of his enormous soul he knows very well that whole parts of his most extravagant doctrines are merely entertainments. In this poem he has no more wisdom to bestow upon humanity, no more ambition to be the leader of France, and no patience for the vanities and delights of pretending otherwise. He is merely a father. Under that spectacular personality of his, Victor Hugo turns out to have been a man with a vulnerable heart. A good poet, almost always—and sometimes a great poet, especially when life got in his way and he had no time to think about his own greatness. ♦

TIME BANDITS

Elmore Leonard brings Cuba to the brink of war.

BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.



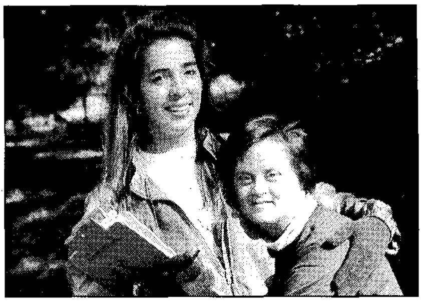
Elmore Leonard

KAREN CALDICOTT

In Elmore Leonard's thirty-fourth novel, "Cuba Libre" (Delacorte; $23.95), there's a scene where a newspaper correspondent extolls the prose of an illustrious colleague: "It isn't flowery, if you know what I mean; it's stark, you might say, without a single wasted word." From Leonard, a man whose prose style is more celebrated than any one of his novels, we can take this as an affirmation of a creed.

Not that the elements of his style—a widely admired "ear for dialogue"; a terseness that calls forth comparisons with Hemingway and O'Hara—are quite what they appear. His dialogue does have a distinctively vernacular flavor, but the effect depends largely on the elided conditional—a knack for dropping "if"s and "when"s. ("Rollie sees me smoking in public he has a fit." "You wanted, you could've married her.") It's the kind of colloquialism that appeals more to the eye than the ear. He does write short, punchy sentences, but short and punchy has long been the normative voice of ad copy, and Leonard was a copywriter for many years. ("Opposites may attract, but it's the cigars that connect. To be shared like wit. To be savored like wisdom.") But what of it? Authenticity in fiction is like sincerity in acting—you've got to know how to fake it.

Leonard's first novels were Westerns, that most stylized of genres, and his latest book could be mistaken for one—what with the horses, the Colt revolvers, the frontier towns—if it didn't take place in turn-of-the-century Cuba. To be exact, it's 1898, the U.S.S. Maine has just been blown up in Havana Harbor, hostilities are brewing between the United States and Spain, and Ben Tyler—a good-natured young man with a hot temper—has other things on his mind. He's become involved in a scheme to run guns for *mambís*—Cuban peasants fighting to rid their land of its repressive Spanish overlords. Before the deal can be concluded, Ben ends up in prison; an officer of the brutal Spanish civil guard, Tavalera, suspects what he's up to. Luckily, Ben has been befriended by both the mistress (a fearless New Orleans beauty) and the factotum (a sixtyish wily mulatto) of a rich sugar baron, Roland Boudreaux. The two—Amelia Brown and Victor Fuentes are their names—free Ben and together they hatch a scheme. They pretend Amelia has been taken hostage by the *mambís*,



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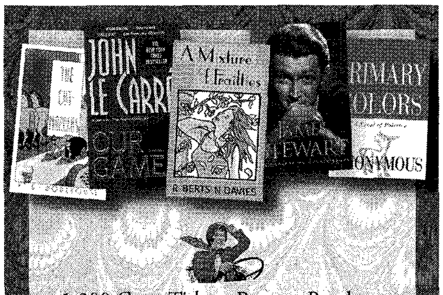

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It might well be argued that imagination is what truly elevates the human animal; that and our unique ability to translate ideas, dreams, wishes, fears and folly into words on a page.

A career military man for more than two decades, **Ralph Peters** has witnessed mankind in its most bestial, and its most noble, states. This bestselling novelist's experiences in the Earth's troubled regions—and at the right hand of the policy makers—have enabled him to create fiction that is informed, intelligent, and authentic. Peters's latest, ***THE DEVIL'S GARDEN***, concerns the abduction of a U.S. senator's daughter in a lawless, oil-rich nation cut loose from the ruined Soviet empire, and how the tragedy is ruthlessly exploited by corporate and political entities seeking influence in the area. But he never loses the human story in the chaos of momentous global events. This is a very contemporary thriller with a brain, a conscience, and a heart.

Donald Johnson's ***PHANTOM ISLANDS OF THE ATLANTIC*** is nonfiction that carries us to imaginary places. A rich bounty of facts, fables, engravings and illustrations, his book explores the strange origins and cartographic histories of seven mythical lands that appeared for centuries on maps, yet which existed in truth solely in the superstitious minds of seafarers and yarnspinners; wondrous realms conjured out of fantasies and terrors in a colorful, bygone age.

While some products of the human imagination are totally outlandish, others are distinctly possible. The widespread respect and popularity of award-winning author **Gregory Benford** is due in large part to his propensity for using hard scientific fact to speculate in fiction on what tomorrow will bring. In his novel, ***COSM***, Benford creates a new universe the size of a basketball in a physicist's lab, and then examines the profound ramifications, repercussions and ethical issues of destiny and responsibility engendered by this singular experiment in godhood.

We'll talk again.

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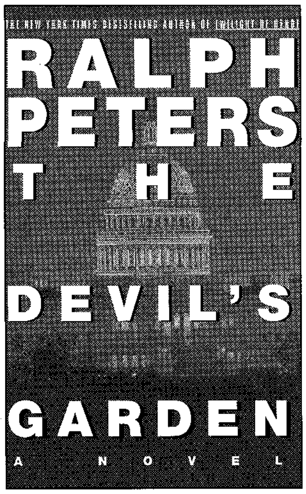

PHANTOM ISLANDS of the Atlantic
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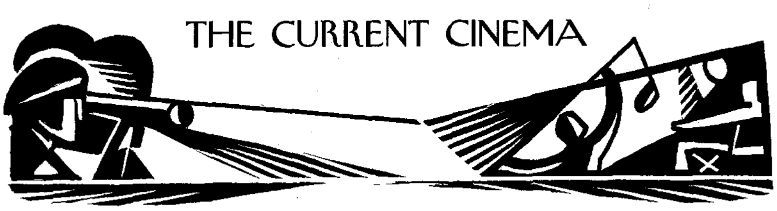
and secure a huge cash ransom from Boudreaux: forty thousand dollars stuffed in a canvas sack. The money will go to help the *mambís* in their righteous struggle against the Spanish. Except that—since it wouldn't be a Leonard novel without a double cross—it just might go to the *mambís'* corrupt and greedy general. Or to the sometimes uneasy threesome of Amelia, Victor, and Ben, who have cause to reconsider their generosity. Or to the implacable Tavalera, who has got wind of their plan and figures he can steal the cash for himself. Where that sack will end up, naturally, will depend on who outwits whom.

Leonard shows his usual flair for characters and capers, and he's good with history writ small—he evokes a bygone Havana with plausible particulars, plenty of narrow streets and closed shutters. History writ large proves less easily assimilated, at times defeating Leonard's formidable style. Early in the book, a friend of Ben tells him, "A correspondent named Richard Harding Davis saw whole villages of people taken from their homes and put in prison camps, where he says they starve to death or die of sickness. Another one, Neely Tucker, saw Cubans lined up against a wall and shot in the back, their hands tied behind them." Try saying *that* out loud. Later on, we hear a newspaperman chattering away to Boudreaux. "I take it you understand the significance of San Juan Hill," the man says, and doggedly explains that it "was part of the outer defense of Santiago, the port where the Spanish fleet was bottled up, the objective of the campaign." Yes, but will this be on the final?

What makes Leonard's invocation of Cuban history more than ornamental is the way the double cross of his own narrative matches the double cross of the historical narrative. American forces came to the aid of the Cuban independence movement, but not because they wanted an independent Cuba. They just wanted to replace the Spanish overlords with American overlords. The island was a prize to be fought over—like that canvas sack. Until the end, Leonard manages to keep you in suspense about who's going to wind up with the cash, but there's one thing you know from the start: the *mambís* never stand a chance. ♦



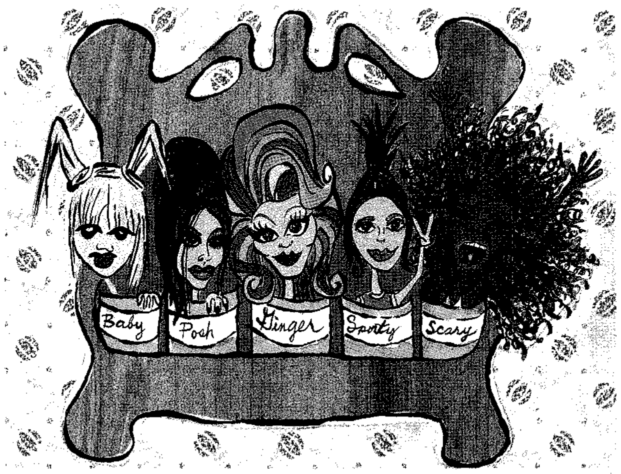
THE CURRENT CINEMA

IN THE FLESH

Songs by the Spice Girls; lovers by Pedro Almodóvar.

BY ANTHONY LANE

FOR those who were fortunate enough, or deaf enough, to have missed out on the musical history of the past year, here is a guide to the Spice Girls. All you need know is that they are a group of five British female singers, though only two of them can actually sing; the others sing along, which is not quite the same thing. The Girls' names are Mel B, Mel C, Geri, Emma, and Victoria; note also the charming sobriquets—Scary, Sporty, Ginger, Baby, and Posh—by which they are known to their pillaging hordes of fans, all of whom are twelve and a half years old. Last summer, I watched three such fans as they chanted the Girls' most contagious hit, "Who Do You Think You Are?," while offering an inch-perfect rendition of their heroines' dance routine. I felt like the Ancient Mariner.



The Spice Girls: canny operators and good sports.

ROBERT MELEE

And now we have "Spice World." The title comes from the new album, but Spice World, it turns out, is more like a house of fun or a state of mindlessness. The Girls travel around a tourist's dream of London in a double-decker bus. They have a manager, Clifford (Richard E. Grant), who sports a range of silk suits and a goatee at the end of its tether. The Girls themselves remain tenaciously in character: Baby Spice, for instance, has a permanent lollipop tucked into her cheek, while the worries of Posh Spice focus exhaustively on her wardrobe. The unfathomable complexities of the narrative turn on the question of whether the group will or will not play at the Albert Hall. Let me put distraught fans out of their misery by revealing that, against terrible odds, the Girls do make it to the gig, where they sing "Spice Up Your Life," with its tremulous Yeatsian refrain:

Slam it to the left
(If you're having a good time)
Shake it to the right
(If you know that you feel fine)
Chicas to the front
Hi ci ya hold tight...

This lovely number, which forms the climax of the movie, is one of the few songs that are performed straight, without cutaway dialogue. On the whole, "Spice World" suffers from a strange musical timidity. Nobody was expecting a concert film like Scorsese's "The Last Waltz" or Jonathan Demme's "Stop Making Sense," for the simple reason that if the dear old Spice Girls played their greatest hits back to back the movie would last only twenty minutes. Even so, those hits are sweetly energetic, like sex without the rude bits, and you might have thought that the director, Bob Spiers, would have the gallantry to stand aside

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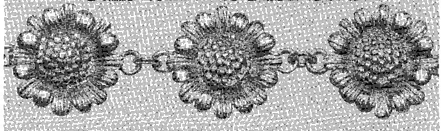

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and let the Girls do their stuff. Instead, he insists on wrapping the tunes in scraps of dramatic context. "Wannabe," for example, comes courtesy of a flashback in which the five unknown, penniless Girls perform to an audience of two. If this was supposed to lend poignancy to the proceedings, it doesn't work, not least because the concept of non-famous Spice Girls is philosophically too dense to deal with.

Spiers is no mug, having directed "Absolutely Fabulous" for the BBC, but it has to be said that nearly every scene in this film falls on its nose. There is a boat chase, an alien encounter, a fashion shoot, and a ripoff of "Speed"; there are swirling fantasies that involve pregnancy and the judiciary; there are cameo appearances from Elvis Costello, Elton John—or Sir Elton, as we must thoughtfully learn to call him—and a host of demi-latte celebrities who will be recognized only by viewers familiar with British television. This is bewildering: the real Spice Girls have spent recent months enjoying quality time with Nelson Mandela and generally conquering the world, so why make a movie that drags them back to the parochial?

Yet somehow I found myself enjoying this limp and lurid picture. Call it gentlemanly obligation. There is a swelling wave of dissent against the Spice Girls, based on the perception that they have achieved a ludicrous measure of fame and fortune on the strength of markedly limited talents. What I particularly admire about the Spice Girls, on the other hand, is that they have achieved a ludicrous measure of fame and fortune on the strength of markedly limited talents. They are the Demi Moore of pop. "Spice World" makes no bones about the absurdity of their success; if the film were any better, it would be an insult to a fine body of women. And, while it may represent a step backward in the art of cinema, it is also a splendid preëmptive strike: anything you can say against the Spice Girls is absorbed and defused in the course of the picture. When the musical arranger stops their rehearsal and says, "That was absolutely perfect without actually being any good," all your defenses come down. The Girls are both canny operators and good sports, *chicas* firmly to the front; to expect them to display melodic genius as well would be most unfair.

It would be instructive to see what a proper movie director, such as Pedro Almodóvar, could do with the Spice Girls. His new work, "Live Flesh," begins with a scene on a bus that would put the Girls to shame. The year is 1970, on a deserted night in Francoist Madrid, and an expectant mother is too late to get to the hospital. Aided only by an old woman in a beehive wig and by the bemused bus driver, she starts to give birth. As the howling moment nears, the camera glides down angelically from on high, giving us time to decide whether we should find the sequence horrendous, comical, or tender; no other living director, it may be added, would offer such a choice.

Jump forward twenty years, and you find the boy born that night, Victor (Liberto Rabal), trying to inveigle himself into the affections of a junkie named Elena (Francesca Neri). They fight, and two policemen are called to her apartment; in the ensuing chaos, David (Javier Bardem), the hunkier of the cops, is shot and maimed, but not before he has exchanged moony glances with Elena. Jump forward six more years, and we find Elena married to the disabled David, Victor coming out of jail and starting an affair with the frustrated wife of David's drunken partner, and so on: just another day in the quiet life of Spain. Only Almodóvar would dare to splash the screen with these primary emotional colors, adding layer upon layer of tragic possibility until the mixture curdles into farce; it's like a drag queen doing Lorca. The question is whether Almodóvar may be tiring of his own brilliant routine. The new work has everything that audiences warmed to in his earlier, blood-hot movies except the sense of joy; he remains endlessly hospitable to his characters, treating their predilections as mania from heaven, but when "Live Flesh" arrives at a happy ending you can feel the creak and strain. He is increasingly fascinated by the bitterness of others—in particular, by the sexual desperation of the middle-aged—yet he himself continues to go at the world with the flourish of youth. How this tension will resolve itself I don't know, but there is always the prospect that Pedro Almodóvar, like Luis Buñuel before him, will triumph as a wicked old man. ♦

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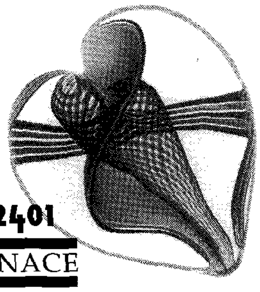

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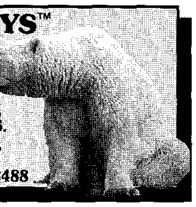

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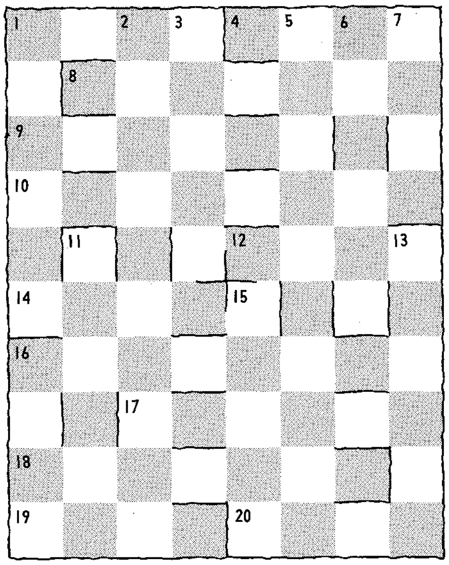

ACROSS

1 Cuba liberation grips island (4)
4 Includes woodworking tool in discussion (4)
8 Founder catches insect and bird (7)
9 Lacking a goal, Rodman collapses (6)
10 Poor elected official joins mature repartee (8)
12 Tennis player shelled kidney-shaped nut (4)
14 Small amount of water seen in hydroplane (4)
16 Let's elaborate about hot place where sweethearts go (4,4)
17 Show coach Lombardi after game's end (6)
18 Heavily attacked arts retrospective associated with government agent (7)
19 Pitch sots out (4)
20 Discover cable-sports award (4)

DOWN

1 Sarcastic bachelor rebuffed Ms. Winger (6)
2 Off-road vehicles on curve chasing left and right (4,6)
3 Nation in relief after recession (5)
5 Syrians block a location near Sudan's capital (10)
6 Henry boards filthy sailboat (6)
7 Type of gin that's dull on the tongue (4)
11 Cave design got rot (6)
13 Uncovered furnace at club's restaurant (6)
15 Excellent informer turned over switchblade (5)
16 Final thing a cobbler needs (4)

• •

The solution to puzzle No. 29 appears on page 81. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.

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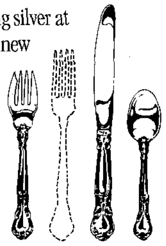

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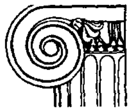

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HOW TO SPEND THE BUDGET SURPLUS

BY DAVID SEDARIS

Dear President Clinton:

I read in the *Sentinel* that, thanks to some belt tightening by the likes of yours truly, we can expect a budget surplus by the year 1999. Seeing as you and your penny-pinching gang of thugs have succeeded in destroying the N.E.A., I strongly urge you to take that budget surplus and use it to sponsor a series of important public art works. The most costly and, I believe, energetic of these projects is my enclosed proposal to carpet the state of New Mexico. This piece calls for the hiring of no less than fourteen thousand Native Americans. Outfitted in government-issue sun visors and kneepads, these people will work nine hours a day for an estimated period of twelve years. The carpet can be bought wholesale through an uncle of mine in Staten Island, and my boyfriend knows where we can get some tacks. Having lost my grant money to tar and feather the Statue of Liberty, I must take the position that you owe not just me but all creative Americans seeking enlightenment through the majesty of art.

Amanda Savage
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dear President Clinton:

I don't know how much of a surplus you're expecting, but I think the first thing you should do is put some stores on your so-called Washington Mall. My family and I visited last summer and were disappointed to find nothing but grass and statues. Since it's the capital of our country, shouldn't Washington's mall be world-class? You've got a fountain and plenty of room for parking. Let's bring on the food court.

Just a suggestion.

The Taylor Gang
Turf Haven, Mich.

Dear Mr. President:

I hear you're looking for ways to spend our budget surplus and thought my little story might inspire you. When I was young, my father would take half of my weekly allowance and put it into a fish tank for my sister's college education. He did this because he liked her the best and I myself had never expressed any interest in higher education. When, at the age of twenty, my sister left college to become a performance poet, my father returned the balance of my money. It came to two hundred and thirty-eight dollars in change, and I spent it all on records and submarine sandwiches.

Brian Teetsel
Lake Janet, Fla.

Dear President Clinton:

Seeing as your federal checkbook has been balanced on the backs of the disadvantaged, I advise you to take that surplus and put it toward a national program providing free body massages and spinal-disk realignment for our low-income citizens. Having borne the brunt of your oppressive economic policies for the past five years, these people can barely stand up straight. It's a wonder they can support even the weight of a knapsack! Now it's payback time, Mr. President, and, as the members of my profession like to say, "Let's get crackin'."

Dr. Marie Cartwrite
Chiropractors for Social Responsibility
Vienna, Va.

Dear President Pothead:

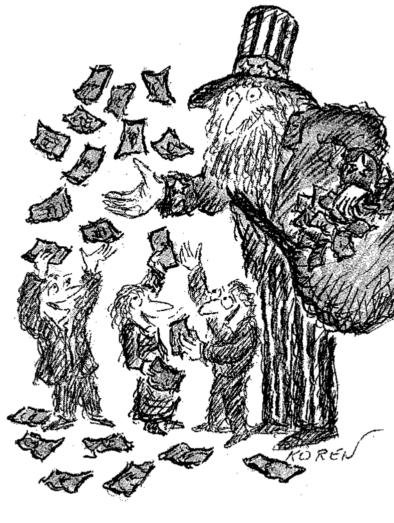
If I remember correctly, the last time we had a surplus, in 1969, you were deseeding a bag of reefer in some cushy college dormitory while I was living in a bamboo cage eating spiders and dung beetles in an effort to stay alive. Sound fair?

Sooner or later, you'll have to lay down your bong and do some serious thinking about this surplus situation. While you are no doubt tempted to spend the money on Thai stick or new Gro Lites for the White House basement, I urge you to take your head out of the clouds and try thinking of someone besides yourself.

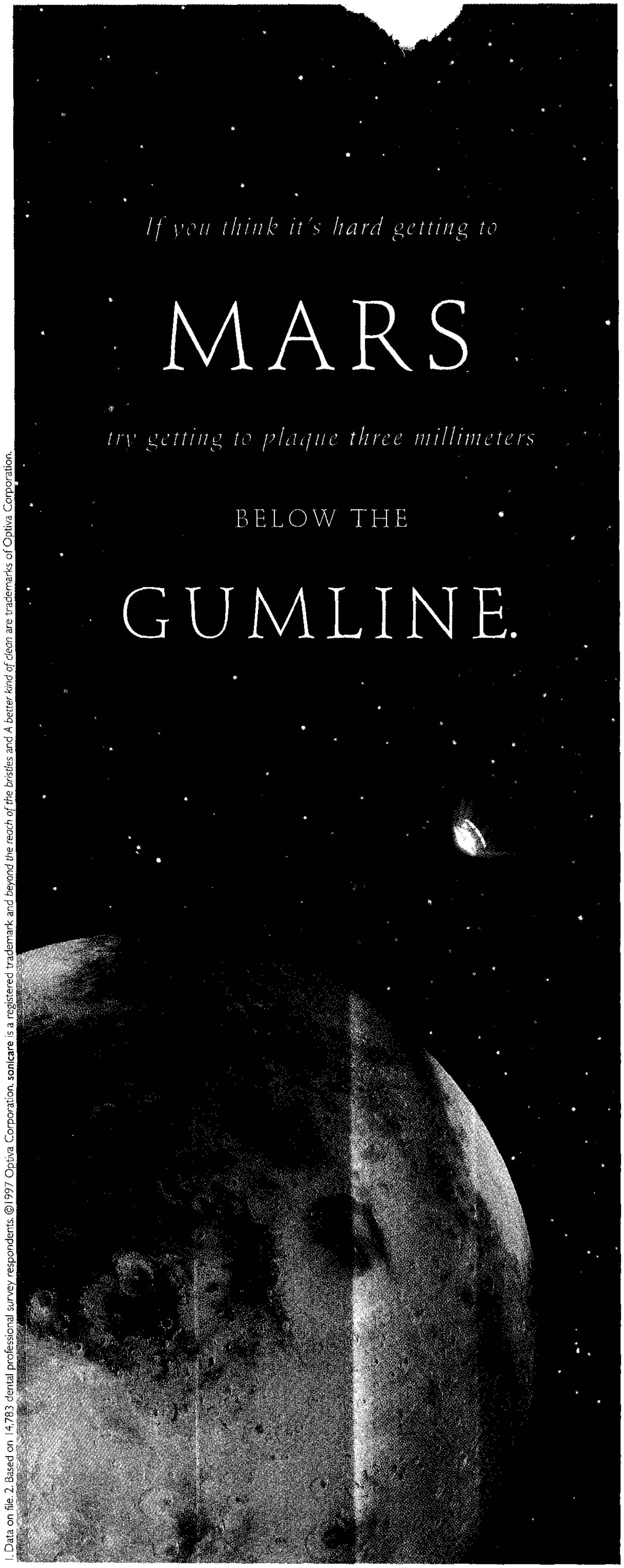
Though it probably comes as news to you, wars are fought by men, not by slabs of polished granite. This country deserves a war memorial that resembles a hero, not a retaining wall! As a tax-paying veteran, I demand a monument that looks like me. (See enclosed photograph.) It's time you set aside your roach clip and found yourself a drug-free American sculptor with a degree in art rather than spelling. Do you want to be remembered as the President who rolled the tightest joints or as the statesman who slept around (a lot!) but still gave the American people something we can all appreciate?

Mull it over, Stoney.

Anthony Primo
Cherry Point, Neb.



EDWARD KOREN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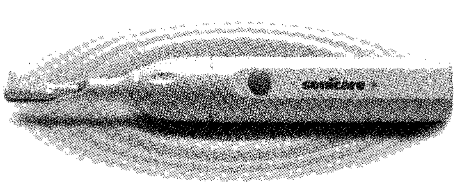

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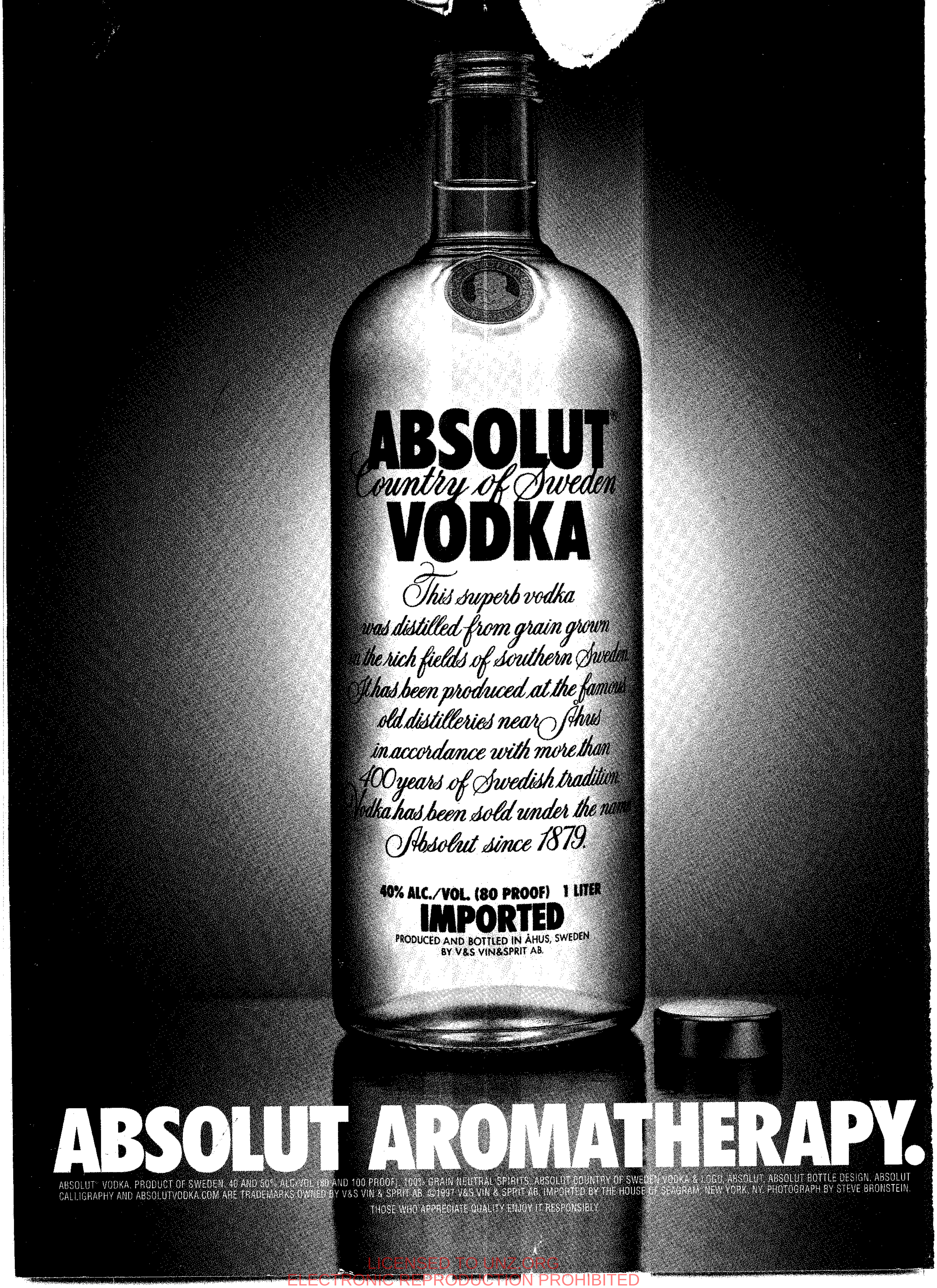
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